A MODERN ANTAEUS

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S LOVE-LETTERS"

Wm Fox & Clark.

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

A MODERN ANTÆUS

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/modernantus00hous

A MODERN ANTÆUS

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"AN ENGLISHWOMAN'S LOVE LETTERS"

NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.
1901

Copyright, 1901, by
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY.

October, 1901.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

4809
H18m20

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE NURSING OF ANTAEUS	1
II.	GERMINAL	8
III.	SHOWS THAT OUT OF A MARE'S NEST MAY SPRING NIGHTMARE	18
IV.	FOLLY LEADS TO WISDOM	27
V.	REAL CHARACTERS AND FICTITIOUS PERSONS	39
VI.	TRISTRAM'S HEART HAS ITS GROWING PAINS	50
VII.	ARBOREAL CHILDHOOD	64
VIII.	MYTH, RITUAL, AND RELIGION	72
IX.	THE ROD THAT BUDDED	89
X.	THE AFFLICTION OF MORALS	99
XI.	IN WHICH A GENTLE CHARACTER DISAPPEARS FROM THE STORY	115
XII.	SCHOOL-DAYS AND HOLIDAYS	122
XIII.	A CHAPTER OF PURSUITS	140
XIV.	THE WATER-FINDER	158
XV.	THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER	175
XVI.	A CHAPTER OF CONTRASTS	189
XVII.	APOLOGIES TO LADY PETWYN	203
XVIII.	LADY PETWYN'S PAST	217
XIX.	A FALL RASHLY REPENTED	228
XX.	BOOTS LEAD A DANCE AT HILL ALWYN	240
XXI.	BEMBRIDGE FAIR	250

2036272

CHAP.		PAGE
XXII.	A CONFLICT OF THE ELEMENTS	264
XXIII.	A CHAPTER OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS	274
XXIV.	PLANS AND SECTIONS	289
XXV.	BUSINESS HEADS AND LOGGERHEADS	301
XXVI.	LIZZIE LOSES HER REPUTATION	313
XXVII.	PRELIMINARY TO A STORM	321
XXVIII.	A BATTLE OF MORALS	332
XXIX.	VIRTUE IN A SWELLED HEAD	341
XXX.	TRISTRAM ENCOUNTERS OBSTACLES	349
XXXI.	TRISTRAM EXTENDS PROTECTION TO AN ENEMY	357
XXXII.	LOVE AND WAR	366
XXXIII.	FORTUNE SHOWS A BLACK FACE	382
XXXIV.	SHOWS THAT THERE IS SOMETHING IN A NAME	397
XXXV.	LETTERS AND A VISIT	408
XXXVI.	ANTAEUS IN TOWN	417
XXXVII.	TRISTRAM AND HIS TRAINER	423
XXXVIII.	A CHANGE OF ADDRESS	429
XXXIX.	WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED	442
XL.	THE WOMAN ON THE ROAD	463
XLI.	A LETTER FROM A DEAD HAND	475
XLII.	LADY PETWYN'S EXPERIMENT	484
XLIII.	ANTAEUS DROPS TO EARTH	493
XLIV.	THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE RIGHTEOUS	496
XLV.	THE HOUSE OF MY FRIENDS	504
XLVI.	IN WHICH THE READER WILL DRAW HIS CONCLUSIONS	514

A MODERN ANTAEUS

CHAPTER I

THE NURSING OF ANTAEUS

THE Antaeus of Greek myth wins his fame before men's eyes only at the decisive moment when the gift of his birthright fails him. The contest which by fresh sips of strength he maintains against one stronger than himself, comes suddenly to an end, when Hercules, clipping him from his mother's embrace, has crushed and flung him back to earth like a squeezed orange. It is as though we only came on Achilles in overthrow, when the arrow of the Trojan pierces his heel; or on Meleager at the moment when his mother restores his fate to the flames; and the modern mind feels a longing to know more of a legend lovelier in itself than that of the arbitrary protection given by the gods to their chosen among mortals. For about the life of Antaeus there was a natural rather than a miraculous charm: he had but in excess the gift which lies, remote or near, in us all.

What, one wonders, must his childhood and growth have been like, from the moment when he emerged earthy out of some cleft of rocks which had once given lap to Oceanus on a day of spring-tides, and crawling to his first wash in the bay, had there lain rocked by the

cradling shallows, a confident suckling; till the day when, as the plough turns the clod back into the furrow, Hercules, the pioneer of the gods of the uncouth ways of earth, turned him back to the place whence he had come. One sees him a valiant crawler from his birth, toppling to his feet early in the first moon of his existence; presently a runner and a jumper, rebellious against leading-strings, yet always back again, rolling a tough hide in mould and flowers, and grass which for him soon ceases to have rough edges at all. One fancies him later testing his strength by the roots and small saplings which he manages to tug up out of Mother Earth; and Earth herself, like the pelican in piety, giving her torn breast gladly that out of it her youngling may fetch strength. Out of a headlong day one sees him plunging back into profound rest and sleep that is without a break — so earth-bound in repose that a beauty half-womanly takes possession of his relaxed limbs; and the nymphs whom he has harried to their crannies during the day, peep out at him, and are no longer afraid. He awakes flushed with that familiar strength which comes to him, he knows not whence, and with brain all abroad for the far ends of a new day now begun; sees, perhaps, up on a sunned hillside what in the distance are like faint streaks of snow lying — knows them for nymphs basking in the security of the open, and is up and on the run, his freakish boy's blood already at caper within him for the manhood that is yet to be; and so, stretches his legs in the wake of those ever wary ones, and brings his morning appetite to the den of an old satyr, who talks racy wisdom while crunching acorns and cob-nuts with the few teeth left to him. One imagines him from fight or play with bruises and wounds, which disdainfully he ignores, curling down in his lair to awake healed at the next dawn. A careless conscienceless rogue he grows, much of a vagabond and a little of a marauder;

till, perhaps, some day he sees visible suffering in his mother's face, and finds that she who is so lavish has also her hours of affliction and penury, which with a rough frightened tenderness he tries to comfort. Also he himself has fears which he cannot master: yet it is not out of these that his fate springs at last; nor is it with fear at all that he goes finally to meet his doom.

So, perhaps, might one try to fill up the lacking detail of the old legend, only to see at last how modern it was under its mask of classic form, and to realise that it might scarcely have interested a Greek mind.

It is a freak of modern thought thus to throw back into the past for things that belong as much or more to our own day: to invent a new myth in order that we may look with wistful self-indulgent regard at what, lying close against our own door, we have failed to recognise. And, indeed, Antaeus to-day is to be known by far different signs from those which marked him in the fallow days of his early legend. Nature herself moves among us in reduced circumstances; she is thankful to sit in comparative peace and self-possession between the four hedges of a square field, and attend in a sort of domestic drudgery to the crops which man puts there into her keeping. And if it is her good chance to have the care of grown grass, which the haymakers will take from her when the days are long, among all the lovers and children who come to tumble there, few are of the Antaeus breed, or mean by their coming more than the ox when he comes to his straw, or than Midas when well-feasted and drunk, he sinks into his bed of down. To very few does she give now the deep sustenance of her breast; and to them often enough her milk is bitter.

This that follows is the story of one to whom her breast was still sweet, and her strength piercing; in him she had back in her arms a contented suckling of huge big appe-

tite — a blithe piece of clay shaped to take in the oil and wine and gladness which still flow from her veins. In the beginning you shall see him vigorously at suck; and at the end you shall not find him properly weaned. If, in the meanwhile, her milk has soured to his taste, others, not I, must judge where the fault has lain.

* * * * * *

There is a moment in early childhood when existence, outgrowing mere instinct, takes to itself the shape of thought: the mind which till then was merely receptive becomes active, and asserts a self-consciousness that can never again be wholly lost sight of. It is then, perhaps, that the life of character begins, and that association starts to lay those colours upon the brain, those primings for the picture that is to follow, which remain so permanent. A word then first laid to mind may carry ever after a distinction that cannot be got rid of; to many minds, for instance, the word "daylight" must have in it also a notion of dawn, the hour which makes light most memorable, the hour at which, perhaps, we first noticed it as children.

The first daylight of Tristram Gayney's life, in any special sense, was that which saw him up from a long bed of sickness, feeling his frail body back again, after an immeasurable absence, in clothes which now seemed harsh and difficult to live in. An outer world dimly remembered was waiting for him; the doctor had given word that, if the weather held fair, he was to go out, and his trained nurse, after dressing and covering him with innumerable wraps, had gone to fetch him his posset, and was taking time to return.

The minutes of waiting had so little purpose that they grew tedious; he took his muffled body to the head of the staircase, lingered there till patience once more became an apparent folly, and at last let a bold proposition venture

ahead of the scruples which stayed his feet. From top to bottom the stairs seemed a great descent, and the dark hall archway through which they led made them all the more formidable. He put down a foot and drew it up again. Then he took hold of the overhead banister rail, slid forward his weight on it, and began to descend.

Even so it felt safer to plant both feet upon every grade; stairs had become unfamiliar things to him. Progressing thus in the flop-and-shuffle style of babyhood, he felt himself ridiculous when the sound of a footstep threatened to make him a spectacle. He loosed hold two steps from the end, tottered, and came floundering forward into the thick-haired rug below.

"All right!" he grumbled aloud, apprehensive of detection in so all wrong an attitude. But the alarm was false; nobody came; and the respite set him off upon his legs again. Across the hall toward the front door his boots made a big feeble clatter; those ends of him had become noisy and too heavy for management; they bumped his feet down at random, and seemed half-stuck to the ground before each step. That he had been ill all over for weeks he remembered; but only now when he tried to walk did he realise how ill his legs had been. All the house seemed to have been ill, too; the coat-rack was emptied of its appendages, and through an open door he saw bare boards, lowered blinds, carpets rolled and stacked into a corner, and dust-sheets over the few large pieces of furniture that remained. The whole place — the hall, the staircase, and the banister — smelt, as he did, of embrocations. Every sight that met his eye denied him recognition, mutilated his feelings, and decimated his affections; and a vague resentment grew in the child's mind against sickness and the absence of friends, as if these were one and the same thing, or arose from the same causes.

In his own case it was mainly true. His illness had come late to prove the expediency of a change already determined on. The house that had long seemed unhealthy had even then been vacated by the rest of its tenants, and nothing but the boy's illness from a lingering fever had prolonged the partial occupancy. So now the revival of his early childish intelligence was to synchronise rather unfitly with the snapping of old associations, when the word "home" would have once more to shape a meaning for itself out of new settings, on the top of others, which were never quite to lose their significance. Tristram's brain, from the *camera obscura* of his sick room, was destined to receive briefly, as on a sensitive film, this impression of old things in dissolution, of things which he had already learned vaguely to love, and would meet with no more in life.

Overhead the nurse's voice called "Tristram!" Before him the front door stood open; he went gravely on, and stepping out on to the gravel, took his first stare at the sunshine and a world new and old.

He knew the ways of this garden well enough, but not its looks. What he remembered best was a place of bare boughs, which had suddenly all gone white and sick, like the furniture under its dust-sheets. After that had followed his own sickness; and from his bed he had watched, at times, a dull sky and the tops of trees that had no green in them. Now it seemed a thousand new things had stepped in; the garden was full of sweet disturbances, flittings of birds, and siftings of a light wind coming and going among the boughs. Also in the heart of the stems was a thick flush of green; and here and there a foam of blossom cast itself white against dark piles of evergreen, or broke in soft dusk against the gay air.

Out of laurels hard by a blackbird broke cover, and fled

chinking to a more distant shelter. To the child that loud note, sounded so near and so suddenly, was like a buffet in the face. Other cries pealed round him, the arrogant laughter of bright lives disregarding his.

He grew sick for a little recognition, and turned to look up at the windows of the house. White blinds looked back at him. Lower than the rest of the first storey, but above his reach, was one irregularly set, and with raised blind, that he remembered with special affection; the lower branches of an easy-climbing tree led up to its sill.

"Auntie Dorrie!" called the child, trusting that the radiant visitor who had brought gay intervals to his sick-chamber might be there within call, "Auntie Dorrie!" a little anger mixed with his surprise that the windows did not fly open to him.

Within doors Tristram's nurse was rummaging in corners for her escaped charge; not dreaming to look for him so far out of hand, she searched in vain. Presently from the end of a small corridor she heard tabberings on glass, and the cry of "Auntie Dorrie!" that began to be a wail. Tracking the sounds in anxious wrath, she came flurrying to the little sun-lit sitting-room, half-bared of its belongings, and saw a white face among branches, flattening itself against the pane.

To Tristram the angry apparition which flew hastily to the window to grab at him was that of an entire stranger: a dearer vision had so strong a hold on his expectations. He went down solid into the bush below him; and his nurse's scream was ever after a part in the bird-chorus that fluted through his memories of that first day.

CHAPTER II

GERMINAL

FOR his health's sake and for out-of-the-way quiet, they brought Tristram to a small hillside cottage, three miles from his late home, which had lain too low, draining an old graveyard, and hemmed round by elms as ancient as the house itself. Now, like a pot-plant turned out to sun, he sat in a trellised porch, where after a while small old-fashioned magenta roses began to bloom, and imbibed there a liking for a colour which turns vicious when transferred from its flowery texture to any fabric of man's weaving. This was the home of his old nurse, who had been his mother's nurse also, and had here retired, worn by domestic strain, on savings and a pension. Coming to this hale locality, she had greened into fresh vigour, and hearing of Tristram convalescent after his long illness, she had clamoured to have that latest of her babes back into her arms. The sight of the welcoming face which leaned into the carriage on his arrival, brought with it only a vague sense of familiarity; but soon her habits with him, and the little home she had made round her of knick-knacks gathered in long service, coaxed his memory to recover the charm of their old relations.

This place where he found himself was hardly beautiful; but to Tristram's eyes it became so. Two cottages backed by a barton stood off the road on a bank, with a bright edge of garden dividing them from the rural traffic

that went by. Round them stood fields, rather treeless, but thick in crops, for the service of which the barton stood as stable-yard and granary, an off-shoot from a larger farm.

The light lay still inarticulate and blanched on the child's mind, brought to renew its sense of local colour in that simple place. His body had still some tremors of its recent illness, and his brain took fright easily at darkness or unexpected sounds; loneliness, on the other hand, began already to be one of his pleasures. All the more quickly did he receive the inspirations of the small rural world, which in a few days contained nothing that was stranger to him than the safe open spaces where he might be alone, yet within sound of Mrs. Harbour's chiding call. Within a fortnight he vegetated into a true cottager.

No doubt his small doings in the few weeks he was there had a plain prosaic exterior; but this ring of fields and farm and garden became to Tristram an enchanted spot, memory made him look back on it as the nest where he first fledged, the holy ground on which, so it seemed to him then, he had stood and watched the tree of life brimming with fire yet not consumed.

Unknown to himself the boy was renewing the associations of a still earlier visit, discovering a mysterious familiarity in things he had seen while yet in the first toddling stage of infancy, and again forgotten.

No chronicle can take in a whole life, and follow it without gaps and omissions; there is a blind spot in the eye of each one of us; it is only by that incompleteness that we see anything. Autobiographers leave whole tracts of themselves undiscovered; nor could Tristram in after years have given more than a maimed account of himself. Even this chronicle depending on many synoptic records has to stray backwards and forwards for hints of him, uncertain of their true sequence; some of them perhaps were

earlier than the day already told of when consciousness first struck hard upon his faculties, belonging in that case to his previous coming into the locality where we now find him. Hints only, for to follow elaborately the schooling of early years would only be wearisome. Young life picking out its five-fingered exercises sounds monotonous when heard without intermission; only now and then does accented experience break in on the routine. Then the exercise changes and becomes a sort of tune; out of it the gods get humorous promptings of what troubles their puppet is likely to be in hereafter, and so set the callow tunester back again to his stiff digital drill.

Mrs. Ann Harbour, the "Nan-nan" of Tristram's youth, tells in her grey old age of his two visits to her hillside cottage many things that would otherwise be forgotten. To her ears the daily noise of him never grew monotonous: of nurses, gods and men may learn a lesson in patience and kind charity. But to the outer world we give no more than random pictures of him, cinematograph glimpses, faces that he threw on and off, till life, taking his measure, found a face-mould to fit him, or to cramp him into that likeness which it chose that he should wear. These faces are the lives through which all that is human passes in its growth; and one wonders how many of them will be allowed to appear before that last Court of Appeal, where Theology calls souls up to judgment. Will each face in turn come pleading its creation, and claiming a soul to inhabit it, as scrupulous Moslems teach to veto the painted and the graven image? Or is it only the last mask of all, the worn-out one lying under the death-sheet, that counts? At the end of most men's lives there are seven bodies demanding resurrection, and which of them all does the soul take to wife? Surely an unbiassed record of life must almost of necessity put a note of interrogation in the place of any final Amen. So here you may find it when all is done.

Of Tristram's earliest days memories have hoarded things which he himself had soon forgotten. Mrs. Harbour tells of him, that from the hour when he could first walk, never was there such a child for getting into water. She might have added — for getting out of it also, from the many times Tristram had stood before her in an unexplained state of drench, requiring dressings in two kinds, each preventive of cold to the system. It was on this point that his tongue first learned to babble fiction, ascribing to a fabulous being whom he named "the Kitchyman" the wringing wetness of his attire. Presently, however, finding that he had to bear the Kitchyman's sins in his own body, he resumed the glory which he had laid aside, let the Kitchyman's name go the way of dreams, and avowed himself independently the culprit.

Once he appeared dragging by the collar a large amiable retriever, and demanded *backsheesh* for the quadruped. For wetness there was not a dry hair to choose between them; but the dog, he insisted, was good, while for Baba he had no kind word — thus early distinguishing a moral difference between his own dampness and that of an unclothed animal. The dog was rewarded with fire-warmth and a meal, dimly suspected of a deed of modest heroism which was born to blush unseen in his own dumb beast's consciousness. Tristram meeting him afterwards about the lanes and fields, would point him out as "Kitchyman's wow-wow," and the two kept up a tail-wagging acquaintance. Yet it may be curiously noted that the only recollection Tristram had of the affair in later years was friendship for a large dog, the origin of which lay forgotten behind the genial character of their meetings.

In many small ways those early years proved him a rare handful; but in the direction of water he seemed to precipitate himself with a sort of chemical affinity. His old Nan-nan, after she had wrung him out to dry time and

again, wept at last, believing that she saw the drowned end of him already revealing itself. She became so apprehensive on the subject that her application of the discipline ceased. On a dry skin he continued to pay tribute to her motherings: wet, he became a sacred object to her. Obstinate questionings began in her devout mind whether her charge had ever been properly baptised or no; and as the pious dread presented itself, she beheld all at once a reason why on every occasion he should gravitate to that element where his spiritual birthright lay denied to him. The closing duty of her domestic service had been to receive him from the hands of a gabbling French *bonne*, and she doubted whether pure Christianity could come out of a land where the English tongue was not spoken. So from long to short it was borne in on her that her babe was in spiritual distress, and his soul clamouring by outward and visible signs for a remedy. Her blood curdled in her one day to hear him talking over the well's mouth and coining back answers from below. Superstitiously she came to the conviction that the child had a familiar spirit; so, in the hopes of setting a barrier between him and further communications, she nerved herself the same night to give him provisional baptism in the large crock tub wherein she bathed him, choosing the name of an old heroic race, and the one which she herself applied to the sturdy troublesomeness of her bantling, as likely to be effectual against any futile assaults of the enemy.

"Trojer, I baptise thee!" was the formal beginning of that exorcism, and the name tickled a place for itself in the child's memory. She followed it up by complete immersion, put extra prayers into his mouth before bed, and tucked him between the sheets with a satisfied sense that she had made a whole Christian of him.

A couple of days later, her confidence sank to a queegle of alarm when she overheard something of the following

colloquy taking place over the well's edge; and, as before, inaudible answers seemed to be finding their way up from below.

Tristram had begun by dropping down a pebble; listening till he heard the sound of its splash below, he called over the brim: "Kitchyman, you 'wake down there?"

The question was repeated with insistence till a satisfactory answer seemed to arrive.

Kitchyman having awakened; "Why can't you climb up here?" was the next inquiry. Repeated as before, it gained impressiveness; the studied deafness of the oracle made him a more real person to the child's brain.

Presently an answer was vouchsafed. "Oh, is that why?" came Tristram's surprise.

The child cogitated, then spoke further: "How am I to come down — in a bucket?" And after longer deliberation, roving off on a fresh theme, "Shall I frow you down some more stones?"

The stones were thrown till the child wearied. He bent forward on his knees and peered down into the well. After a pause he said: "Now I'm going to play in the garden; when you want me you've got to call."

There was a further pause, "What?" said Tristram, preparing to go. Then again, more interrogatively, "What?"

This time he was able to gather the Kitchyman's meaning. "Oh!" he blabbed, "call 'Trojer'!"

As the word went out of him he felt himself caught up from behind and borne away indoors, there to be set down to say his prayers in the presence of kitchen chairs and fire-irons, and with the smell of dinner seething to him from under saucepan lids — a thing disturbing to his small jog-trot sense of theology. For the rest of that day, and for many days afterwards, his well was forbidden him.

Other talkings to himself which she overheard on his second visit to her, had the effect of raising in the old body beliefs which had grown dormant. It was evident to her senses that the child knew of places whither his legs did not carry him, and saw things for which experience provided him with no name. His powers of escape were phenomenal; when she thought him most safe in one direction, he would return to her mildewed and mired from another. Mrs. Harbour seriously doubted within herself whether he had not two states. She tempted his confidence with the best she had to give: on the tablets of his brain her characters stood writ large. But though she was a veritable storehouse of wise lore which he was free to rummage for the satisfaction of his own terrors, never could he be persuaded to repay her in kind: over the parallel wonders of his own life his lips shut stolidly. The fairies and the evil chances, and the happenings which filled hobgoblin corners of Mrs. Harbour's superstitious soul did but push into the deepest recesses of his secrecy the child's assured sense of their truth. Her mouth was a medium for dark and oracular utterances; he worshipped its sound silently. Words of a gory flavour that she used, he loved and waited for; they lay sensationally at certain points of her stories, like murder stains on a carpet whose pattern he knew by heart. Left unexplained, they made for themselves enlarged meanings in his brain: horror enriched itself with the sensuous opulence of their sound.

"A whole menagerie of wives," was a phrase in the "Blue Beard" story, against which his mind aired itself aghast; and from "Jack the Giant Killer," the "out tumbled his tripes and his trollibones," which described the haggis-like undoing of the hospitable giant, at whose table Jack treacherously sat down, gave him another freezing vision.

Such dear terrors childhood hugs, nor wills to be rid of them; prefers rather, like older greedy dyspeptics, to suffer horribly from the satisfaction of its fundamental cravings. The appetite for knowledge has lasted well since our first parents implanted it in us, and we hunt it more through life than we do happiness. Beside its charms, blissful ignorance nods, a withered wall-flower. One portion of childhood, that especially between the ages of three and seven, is almost entirely dominated by the dreams of waking and sleeping, which spring from undigested knowledge. When those years are over, they leave behind them a field ploughed alike by battle and by burial, wherein at least one phase of theological thought has died and another sprung. Here, one may think, meets the mingled blood of ancestry, and we feel our parentage fighting within us to a confused end for the predominance of race. During that time of his life, names and sounds and things had for Tristram a weight and terror which worked out into a species of fetish worship.

Strange little antipathies moved in him also, as opposed to the terrors of which he grew fond. Mrs. Harbour saw him rise up one day from his crawlings with a white face, crying to her that he had touched a "pussy cat." Knowing of nothing that could be there, she explored, and found a ball of fluff, such as collects from the brushing of carpets; and as she handled it, the child whimpered, imploring her to put it away.

Upon Tristram's solitary goings a wonderful troop of potencies waited, big and black and bogey-like. In his pursuit of and flight from the evil chances which dodged his footsteps, he became something of a gambler with fate; yet had, too, the elation of a hunted thing sure of its agility and speed. Adventurous instinct would draw the child on to snuff the tainted air of dark corners, and to tempt, where mystery and danger lurked, the spring which he

never saw, but felt rearing at his back as he turned and ran.

Many of these potencies had come out of the lullabies sung to him by his old Nan-nan, dreamy suggestions of them gradually becoming more real as their legends fixed themselves in his mind, till each at last grew into a separate godhead. Robin the Bobbin was one of these, a deep-mouthed brute, swelling visibly over his Sunday dinner of priests, people, and churches.

> "Robin the Bobbin, the big-bellied Ben,
> Ate more meat than fourscore men:
> He ate a cow, he ate a calf,
> He ate a butcher and a half;
> He ate the church, he ate the steeple,
> He ate the priest and all the people."

So the song ran. Tristram used to wonder how and why, out of that rapacious appetite, the second half of one poor butcher escaped. His imagination gave him sight of a pair of legs shooting in panic round the world, anywhere, anywhere, to be out of it; and his fear was lest some day in the lane he might meet them running.

Another of his most cherished bogeys was the "Kornkree," that had lived for many days in a great fixed wardrobe of the now vacated home, but had easily transferred its dwelling to the dark coffin-like stair-cupboard of Mrs. Harbour's small cottage. Never could Tristram climb that stair alone without a dreadful anticipation in his two legs that some day the devil would take the hindmost and have him fast.

The ritual and religion of Tristram's life were far more bound up in these hobgoblin observances than in the small forms, which he said over by rote night and morning at his old nurse's knee. Started from so pagan a setting, a similar, dissimilar being, germinating out of the

innumerable births and deaths of these mental microbes, we are presently to see him come to youth's and man's estate.

If by now the reader has a smattering of Tristram's intellectual and physical equipment, he will be ready to follow him for a while through incidents toward which the motive force lies here behind.

CHAPTER III

SHOWS THAT OUT OF A MARE'S NEST MAY SPRING NIGHTMARE

THE barton at the rear formed a boundary for poultry, which lay in the care of Mrs. Tracy, the tenant of the adjoining cottage. She and her daughter Sally would often take Tristram with them when they went the rounds on a search after eggs; and before long the child became familiar with the queer habits of broody hens, and found zest in tracking these cenotaphs of maternity to their shadowy nesting-places. Every day gave chance of discovering lyings-in illicitly conducted; and to pry out some nest richly lined with accumulated deposit was a delight to the boy's marauding instinct. To the methodical egg-collector, on the other hand, these brood-cravings were a worry and a waste of profit, eggs of doubtful date and condition having to be tabled off from the results on which payment was earned. It was natural, therefore, that unauthorised sittings should be sternly suppressed. Tristram saw one day with squirmy horror an obstinate brooder ducked almost to death; pleaded for its life, and watched it slowly revive from the heap of rubbish where the callous-hearted Sally had flung it to drain. It was as broody as ever the next day, and for its persistence went up in the urchin's estimation, while its foiled persecutor went down.

Though at times he played with the children from the neighbouring cottages, his games with them gave the

least effective employment to his intellect. He preferred loneliness, or to stand at elbow of older folk, watching doings that for him had a far greater suggestion of real purpose. He would follow the farm-hands as they fed and stabled their horses; or when the haymaking had set free the fields by the lower farm, would accompany the beasts down to their night-pastures, himself proudly at perch on the broad back of a dark favourite. There, no rider, the boy would hang, clinging to a last tuft of worn mane, and, if the creature stopped to browse, was as likely to get tumbled off as to stick on, but would in no case ask to be dismounted till the end was reached.

One morning he awoke to a busy humming noise abroad in air, and to feel his bed shaken under him by an accompanying vibration. Looking out of his small lattice, he saw, for the first time, a threshing-machine busy at work in the yard below; workers were up aloft, and round them motes were flying, making a mist in the bright air. The machine itself was backed close upon the wall against which rested Tristram's bed, so that from his window he almost could look down the black throat of the monster who inspired him with so little fear: and for many absorbed hours of that day, he stood watching the steam-thing and its human accessories at work. Then it chanced that, peeping into the water-tank from which it drew supply, he saw a mouse that had wantonly been thrown there to slow death, paddling round the sides in endeavour to escape, and reaching instinctively to pull it out, got surprisingly bitten for his pains. He threw off the rescued vermin in a sort of horror, while frightened wonder took possession of him at the un-understandingness of the creature he had been moved to pity. Creeping furtively away with his bleeding finger-end, he cried softly to himself, not for the pain, but for the shock to his hurt feelings. The incident aged him, thrust life at him in a fresh

aspect; and it was as a tired morsel of himself that he came soon after, and dropped to sleep long before bedtime, in Mrs. Harbour's arms.

Thus from one and another, and only at times from himself, we get a few memorable factors of the child's life, its wild-honey storing itself in the cells of many diverse minds. Mrs. Harbour, as she clasped him sleeping, and wondered at that early weariness, did not know how his small brain already held beginnings of an old age, which was to be so much before he was twenty-two.

Some days later at breakfast, while he sat mugging his bread and milk, Tristram's ears were ravished by hearing the name of his Aunt Doris read out to him from a letter which Mrs. Nannie was holding. It was from the dear lady herself, and contained in one part devout messages addressed to her boy, ending in a long series of round O's, an established form of epistolary greeting between her and the illiterate eyes of her godchild.

Tristram demanded his own, and hugging them with a fondling remembrance of their author's niceness, babbled to have repeated to him once more all that the letter had said. While he kept fast possession, Mrs. Harbour recited the substance of news which put a term to her own happy tenure of authority: within a few days he would be under his godmother's roof, there to await the re-gathering of kindred, who had almost dropped out of recollection. In the names read over to him, those of his mother and of Marcia, his sister, were the fainter memories. The sunny South of France had held them estranged; even now, with the former, his meeting was likely to be delayed till the most equable conditions of sea and weather could add ease to the long journey, and so northward a return.

But for Tristram the thought of his Aunt Doris was sufficient for the day; behind that all happiness blew.

His mind went out into his small world on a search for her whereabouts. To his question "Where is she now?" the name of Little Towberry for answer carried a flavour of fruits, a garden, and a creeper-covered house, lighting on a mind in which sweet tastes and scents were the keenest prompters of memory. To spot it down on his picture-puzzle of places, he asked how long it would take them to get there; and his nurse, meaning by train, reckoned it as only an hour.

He retained the letter with a parade of ownership which Mrs. Nannie was at no trouble to dispute, knowing that at the day's end it would return to her safely enough, with all the dirt of his affections upon it, but in no other way damaged. His instinct for treasure was tenacious; this particular one accompanied him through the many occupations of a long day. She saw him building it round with a wall of pebbles on the brick floor of the porch, till near the hour of noon; later he was tempting the snap-dragons to take bites of it; and at tea-time he sold her the corner kiss on the last page, in return for some sugar upon his bread. When the indulgence had been won, the mercenary character of the transaction lay upon his conscience; so the kiss was bought back by a promise to be good and obedient under charge of Sally Tracy, while Mrs. Harbour went off with the girl's mother for an evening's marketing.

To be put to bed by any hands but the customary ones of his own Harbour was purgatory to the subtle, shy instincts of the child's anatomy. On a previous Tuesday night he had sat up stolid and stormy, refusing the ministration of strange hands; and had fallen into Mrs. Harbour's bosom on her late return, weeping loudly for relief after the long tension of his resistance. Sally Tracy had in her nature the growing-pains of the bully, and remembered against him the impotence to which her short spell

of management had been reduced. Now, however, Tristram's promise of goodness extended even to an engagement that Sally should do the necessaries of his toilet. Mrs. Harbour relinquished him with a few parting injunctions, and the child watched her till out of sight round the corner of the lane.

Sally chose for a beginning to be nice to him, inviting his company on her evening search for eggs among the farm out-buildings; and the small, willing body followed her blissfully about, peeping behind ladders and boards, and under piles of farm-implements, in huge content over being made useful. He found two eggs himself in a spot which she had overlooked; and her apron being heavy, she allowed him to carry them. He held them as carefully as if they had been chickens, and with small regard for anything else, followed her about with the tremulous enthusiasm of a child when it feels itself emphatically good.

Into a dark corner went Sally, peering for spoil. Coming too closely behind with no eyes but for what he held, Tristram set foot on a nest hidden among straw. At sight of three fair yokes spilled ruinously from cracked egg-shells, away went his heart into his boots; he cried out on himself in sheer dismay over so deplorable a mishap. Could Sally have trounced him on the spot, or shaken the breath out of his body as he deserved, her temper had been relieved; but her lapful of eggs was in the way. To give vent to her feelings she let her tongue go, and assailed him in venomous words.

Tristram heard the dread arm of the Law invoked; was assured in all seriousness that a policeman should be fetched that very night to take him away to the town-gaol. "No, no!" the child protested; his voice rose up in a wail and hung ready to expend itself in weeping. "But I say yes!" retorted Sally; "you wait till I've taken

all the eggs in, then see! And it'll be handcuffs as well if you go dropping those other two." He stretched them out to her in terror lest the thing should happen; but now she would not do him the bare kindness of taking them from him. She shot at him another threatening look, and returned to her occupation, little knowing how hard a blow she had already struck. As for Tristram, wherever she went, he followed her about mutely; in the gathering dusk of the day's end he saw a Robin the Bobbin of real flesh and blood waiting for him, a vision which had not the exaltation of imaginary horrors.

For a time, fearing the greater desolation of solitude, he clung to his persecutor; while she, seeing what effect her words had, started to harp once more upon the terrors she had conjured. Then the fear of being put to bed by her, there to wait till the Law's arm should reach out and claim him, became once more a mastering horror, and he set to planning a hiding-place for himself till Mrs. Harbour's return. Sally spied legs beginning to lag, and this hint of old insubordination jogged her to fresh cruelty. Happily to her purpose she found waiting at the threshold, when she brought in her takings, a bullock-eyed youth who had begun loutishly to seek her favour, and to carry on with her in the long summer evenings an incipient and desultory courtship. He came now to invite her to a walk in the lanes.

Sally, having Tristram on hand, could not well leave him and go; she suggested, therefore, as a thing of sound sense, that they should set off and meet the policeman, so as to save him one half of the journey. The bullock-eyed youth, told how matters stood, grunted ominously, and guessed he knew a bit of road where they would be certain to meet him. Tristram had not a word to say against it; in the presence of this new enemy his spirit died utterly, and he went as a lamb to the slaughter, feeling but

a slight alleviation of his distress, when for a while they ignored him to talk of their own affairs.

The last bands of level sunlight were casting themselves through high hedges on to opposing slopes of pasture, when they came to the division of roads which Sally's follower had spoken of. There, on the angular grass-plot which the trisecting traffic spared, for lack of other employment they turned their idle minds once more to Tristram's discomfiture. When the girl dropped her threats from dull-witted weariness, her swain, to flatter her, took up the tale; he pictured the gaol, thumbing its horrors in clumsy fashion, but effectively enough for a child's imagination.

Tristram had at last reached that point of panic when to be desperately brave or cowardly becomes equally possible. Boots and the leathery creak of corduroys sounded along the lane; farm-hands whom the child had come to know from their nightly passings were returning after work in the fields. He rose to his feet with determination, and no doubt in a visibly scared way, but without a word said, pushed his hand into the fist of the first he could get to.

The two on the grass-patch called to him to come back; Tristram tightened his clasp, and the man getting a rough comprehension of his plight, turned and let go some rough words on the pair of them. His beneficent oaths flew with sufficient moral weight to strike cowardice into the culprits; they made no struggle for the possession of Tristram, and the child went off with his new-found protector, forgetting almost in his sudden relief the terror that still lay ahead. When they were come to the two cottages, his companion paused, and was for letting the boy go at what he judged must be his intended destination. But the place still looked empty, and Tristram feared to be left where the others might return and find

him. So, to friendly enquiries, he replied stoutly that he meant to go on with them to the farm, there to meet Mrs. Nannie as she returned; and the man was quite satisfied.

Within the rickyard from a dark corner of the cart-shed, he watched the waggons housing for the night, and began to be comfortably assured that no policeman would come to look for him there. He thought to be safe at least until the return of Mrs. Harbour, whom he would see as she went by up the road. Stepping more and more into the shade, he was presently forgotten by the men busy over the wind-up of their work: before the rick-stands had become wholly frocked in the shadows of approaching night he found himself left alone. But in a little while the comfort of solitude was devoured by the increasing dusk, and the influences of an hour impressive to a child's fears; limb-bound he had not strength or will to return alone up the darkening lane. Yonder, or still more when the cottages were reached, he might find the dreaded handcuffs lying in wait for him, and he realised, with a chilly dread of being altogether forgotten, that there he must stay on till he was called for.

A child in distress waits upon many hopes, and is very slow in letting each one go by. For a long time Tristram hoped that his Nan-nan would come here and find him. He doubted whether he had kept his promise to her, or been good at all; but he had reached so low a stage of fear that an honest scolding from a familiar tongue would be welcome to him. Mrs. Nannie's beneficence shone to him palely like the beginning of evening's star. Was it not to her bed that he crept out of the way of evil dreams? In fevered wakefulness also it was her bosom that had soothed him, and often over wasp-stings and other evils of life her mitigating influence had been displayed. In his comfortlessness he longed for her, but with the delay longing had grown sad; there was no radiant hope in it

now. Pitted against the terrors that were pressing against him even Nan-nan might prove no sure tower of defence.

When darkness in its full degree had settled over his hiding-place, he became so dispirited that he had a mind to cry out to the next footstep that went by. Yet when some undetermined wayfarer came down the road and halted to peer in over the rickyard gate, he found all at once that even the courage to cry out for succour had been wrung out of him. As soon as the intruder was gone and he could feel himself safe from observation, to make concealment doubly sure he climbed up into the waggon by which he had been standing, and finding it thickly stowed with sacks, crept into a hollow corner where lay some straw. There he curled himself into a tight ball, and began wearily to cogitate whether, when light came to release him, he would not go boldly ahead, and, from certain peril to a chance of safety, turn runaway. He remembered with soft affection that somewhere in the world was his Aunt Doris, the fair keystone of dreams only a few hours old, living, if he could only know in what direction to look for her, not more than an hour's journey from where he was. Thinking of her so near to hand, and of the probability of finding her if he kept straight along the one road he knew, he let his eyes close on the saddest day's end of his whole life; and it was with no evil dreams to break the completeness of the relief that mild-handed sleep at last stole in on him, and let her balm soak through the pores of his tired faculties.

CHAPTER IV

FOLLY LEADS TO WISDOM

WHEN he awoke it was with an apprehension of sound which had grown customary to him during sleep. The waggon was in forward motion, and through all its boards and beams, was grumbling and exclaiming at the unevenness of the way; the sudden jolting of a patch of rough road-mendings had shaken Tristram back to consciousness. Overhead were vanishings of starlight; and an atmosphere, grey within grey, lifting itself slowly back toward life, told of an hour altogether unusual and strange.

Presently, as the waggon eased from the toil of its ascent into level going along a brief ridge of hill, he became convinced of new daylight: like the splinter of straw thrust through a partition into the pent space where he lay, joggled a ray of sunbeam. The child peered out; in amazement he found himself nowhere at all; all the short landmarks of his life had disappeared, and so far as his knowledge went, he was as much adrift as a castaway with no horizon on all sides save dead levels of water.

On the foot-board against the partition where he leaned, sat a carter with feet dangling over the shaft. Tristram, by putting his hand through the railed side of the waggon, could have touched the man's coat. When, presently, he summoned up courage to do so, off jumped the

fellow into the road: mere coincidence; yet the action set Tristram's blood tingling at the dread of unfriendly discovery in so unexplainable a position, and fixed him in a determination not to reveal himself. The cart still jogged on, the man walked by its side, and Tristram lay within, feeling very chill and cramped after his hard night's lodging.

Maybe more than an hour had elapsed when the carter drew up before a wayside inn, and went round to the back to find whether any one were astir at that early hour. Tristram pushed up his head from between the sacks and looked out. In another moment he had stepped across on to the footboard, and was scrambling his way to ground. Delightful firm earth was under him; he tottered on feet that had grown numb from constraint. All at once a spaniel from the inn-yard spied him and gave tongue. It was the mere bully-ragging of habitual watchfulness, but enough to send Tristram bolting down the road; nor did he halt till he had scrambled through a gap and put the cover of a small plantation between himself and the highway. When he had attained to that degree of safety, wonder began what he was to do next. He feared to go back to the road till the waggon had passed by; having now an absurd feeling that the carter would, at sight of him, know how he had come, and forthwith lay hands on him as a vagabond and trespasser. So to wile away the time till the track for the following of Aunt Doris should be free, he climbed up the slope of the plantation, that he might from the higher ground find what sort of country lay round him.

In the still morning air he heard presently the sound of a whet-stone upon a scythe: somewhere near late hay-cutting must be going on. He followed out the sound till it brought him through an upper edge of coppice to the brink of a bare field, over which a figure was stepping

methodically under the pure light of early day. Tristram stayed to watch within cover of the plantation. The man scythed, but he scythed ill; along his track lay jagged edges and uncut tufts, and his strokes lacked confidence and breadth. Now and again he gave a sanguine flourish, and was pulled up as the point of his implement skegged the turf. When this happened, he did not use the language of ordinary men: he said, "Dear, dear!" in a soft, grieved voice, and went over the piece he had bungled with slow and painstaking humility.

Tristram had enough knowledge to tell him that here was no farm-hand. It was a small elderly figure, dressed in clothes of a peculiar grey, and wearing a bright blue tie; the coat which had been taken off lay neatly folded on a shorn space of ground hard by. He noticed also that one of the hands which wrestled with the scythe wore a ring with a green stone in it. Bold curiosity quickened; the thought grew formed, "I will go and let him see that I am looking at him; then he will speak to me." It was the child's most diplomatic way of securing an introduction. He stepped cautiously to the adventure, with his eye upon the swing of the scythe, till he came within the mower's sphere of vision. The movement stopped; the man stood up, and saw a fragile apparition of childhood gravely standing within the borders of his privacy.

Tristram felt the inquisition of a clear blue eye pervading his identity, and was as much trapped as though a hand had been laid upon his collar. A voice of gentle sprightliness saluted him with "Good-morning." Where had he sprung from? he was asked.

"I came in a cart," said the boy.

"A cart? Not up here," objected the other.

"I ran."

"An entirely right thing to do!" was the genial response. "And where are you for now?"

"I'm going to find Auntie Dorrie," said the boy.

"And 'Auntie Dorrie'; where is she?"

"I don't know. She's somewhere where I've been once. I want to go to her."

"But are you going to her all alone?"

With a lip that began to quiver Tristram mumbled "Yes;" adding, "Please, I don't want any one else to know!"

The mower put down his scythe. "Where have you come from now?" he asked.

Tristram's eyes showed tears. "I don't want to go back there at all!" he pleaded. "I only want to go to Auntie Dorrie."

"Have no fear, you shall go to her! But you have not yet told me what your name is."

The child became suspicious at the question, and made a beginning of reserve. "Please, I would rather not tell you," said he.

To that the stranger nodded in courteous agreement, and taking up his fallen scythe, wiped it meditatively with a wisp of mown grass. Presently he looked towards the boy again. "You seem tired; chilly, too, eh? Sit down there on my coat, then, while I finish what I'm about. Wrap yourself in it and go to sleep if you like."

"I'm not tired," said Tristram, "I went to sleep in the cart." But he went and curled himself down on the coat. One of his queer instincts was to judge of people with whom he wished to make friends by the smell of their raiment. Before altogether trusting him he wished to know what sort of smell this new acquaintance carried about with him. A very brief sniff approved to his judgment the man he had to deal with: the coat actually bore the scent of lavender. He sat up in full reassurance to watch the scythe when it resumed its play; and as the other went

on working without seeming to observe him at all, the child grew convinced that Providence had sent to him here a person altogether good and kind and fit to be trusted.

Presently, when the stranger had finished a square, he leaned his implement against the fence and straightened himself with a sigh of relief. Glancing across to Tristram, "Little prince," said he, "are you hungry?"

The child found an explanation suddenly supplied for the gnawing pain within him. The world had gone so wrong with him in the last twelve hours, that he had forgotten to think of its ordinary comforts. Now with a big sense of injury, he confessed to have had nothing since tea the day before.

"Since tea!" cried his friend. "Why, you must be famished! There's some oat-bread in that left-hand pocket; eat and be filled!"

The boy munched his way blithely through a hunch of home-made brown. The other, after regarding him for some time, put on his coat with decision, and said, "Come along with me and have some breakfast."

Tristram hesitated, having a conscience to purge of offence against this angelic being who accepted his existence on such generous and unenquiring terms. He went forward to give himself frankly up into the custody of a kindness which had overthrown his suspicions. They joined hands. "My name is Trampy," said the boy.

"And a very good name too!" chuckled his companion. "Auntie Dorrie is Trampy also, I suppose?"

"No, that's my name; it's what she calls me."

"It is not your father's, either?"

"Oh no! it's nobody's but mine; it means Tristram. Nan-nan calls me 'Trojer'; but Tristram Gavney is what I am."

"And which of all these names am I to call you?"

The boy's heart was all up in love and embraces for this benign sending of fate, but as yet he could not utter his feelings. He became garrulous upon other matters; his quick bird-like voice chirruped and prattled by the old man's side; and while susceptible youth rippled a tale concerning the simple facts of its life, susceptible age bent flattered ears to listen, and thought much was wonderful which was really quite ordinary.

They walked through long grass on a short cut to the house, which could be seen ahead, bowered over by trees; and all the way Tristram ran breathless over names and things, but had not a word to say of the events which had brought him to his present pass. "Tristram Gavney I am," he repeated; "I've been ill, but I'm well now. Auntie Dorrie is going to have me to stay with her; I've got a letter from her in my pocket. Mother's away, because she can't get well over here; she's got Marcia with her. I remember Marcia. Mother couldn't take me because I'm a boy and too noisy; Marcia's noisier, though, when she's here." To an enquiry from his friend: "Oh, Marcia? — that's my sister; they used to call us twins once; but I know I'm taller than her now. Nan-nan says she's a tomboy. Mother and father are fondest of her, and Auntie Dorrie is fondest of me; I'd rather have Auntie Dorrie fond of me. My father's rich, and that's why he has to be often away. I don't remember him much. When mother comes back we shall all be together again and live in a big house because my father's rich. Are you rich, too?"

"I have more than is good for me, I'm afraid," replied his companion.

"Then why do you have to mow?" asked Tristram. "It's only the poor people who mow where we are."

"The grass wants cutting, so I am learning how to do it. I like to find out how things are done."

"Then do you want to be a labourer really?"

"Yes, a labourer really; that's the best thing on earth that one can be."

"And what are you now?"

"I'm a poor thing they call a philosopher."

Tristram went back to his own interests; he had a simple genius for happiness: Life's primaries glowed under his artless handling, and his listener did not tire. A wonderful friendship sprang up there and then between the two, as they went damp-footed over dewy clover towards the railings which hemmed in shaven and shorn turf and bright garden beds. Crossing a slight indentation of ground, Tristram put down his foot: "Is there water under there?" he enquired.

"No," returned his companion, "it's only that the dew lies a little heavier there; it's what comes at night without rain."

"Is it all down there, then?" asked the child.

The Sage took gentle pains to explain the matter.

Tristram said: "There's often water where there's long grass; once I didn't see it, and I fell in." Had his nurse been by she would have marvelled to hear him speak of "once"; but to the child many occasions had become only one memory.

When they were entering the house, at sight of a manservant, Tristram drew back. "Is there any policeman there?" he enquired.

Friendly intelligence grew enlightened in some small degree as to his disorder. "Oh no," said the philosopher. "I don't let policemen in here; I've no use for them." He felt the child's hand tighten upon his.

"You won't let them take me?"

His hand affirmed friendship. "Indeed I won't!" he responded.

There was silence: then, "I broke three eggs yesterday!" said Tristram.

"Does Auntie Dorrie know?"

His answer, "No; I want to tell her!" was uttered with wild eagerness.

During breakfast the whole tale was told; and at the finish, in spite of those friendly eyes, the child had grown white over the telling of it. The philosopher smiled, and put the law to him with sage simplicity of speech. "What you did by accident," he said, for a wind-up, "Miss silly Sally thought you had done on purpose. Knowing what I know, not a policeman in the kingdom would want to touch you. Now I, too, keep fowls, and somebody has been stealing mine, for which thing our local policeman is a little to blame. Now, if you would like to see a policeman scolded, come and behold my biddies first while we send for him, and the deed shall be done. Then, when I have chastened him, you can send word by him to yours of the mistake there has been about you. I myself will take care that Miss Sally's mind gets put straight."

Tristram listened with large breaths until the last shadow of doubt had been removed from his understanding; once delivered, the rush of his faculties back to their wonted liberty of action would have struck memorably on a heart less tender than the one now open to him. The Sage, on telling it afterwards, made note of the sensitive face with sorrow in it, like that of some wild creature straining to be free; and, suddenly finding itself so, giving in the joy of its abandonment, a poignant indication of the unnatural anguish through which it had passed. It was only with some reserve that he allowed himself to speak of the wild outburst of gratitude which a cruel contrivance of dull wits had indirectly won for him. Tristram fairly romped through the rest of that day.

To the inn enquiry was sent, bringing back information as to the precise locality from which Tristram and his waggon had come; for of names and places that could give postal guidance, Tristram had only words of domestic usage in his memory, and in his pocket the letter bearing at its head the Little Towberry address of his Aunt Doris. The charitable philosopher had the thought to send two telegrams — one to a rather chance address for the blameless Nan-nan, whose distracted condition needed no guessing on his part. Before noon wires sped in two directions comfortable tidings of the small tramp's safety, and offer of a welcome to any friend who might come to claim him.

An answer came with dispatch that his Aunt Doris was already flying to receive him, roundabout, but with all speed possible. Rich apologies for the causing of trouble followed; the philosopher smiled at the pretty wording of them, and reckoned ruefully the few short hours left to him of the small creature who now gambolled unabashed through the ordered privacy of his domain.

The comfort when it came to Mrs. Harbour was badly needed; her poor humiliated soul lay in a state of wreck and hot fiery indignation. The blow dealt to her prestige was felt by that most loyal old body amid her shrewdest grief. Sally had confessed to a part at least of her wickedness; and Mrs. Nannie, wringing heart and hands over the dimly understood sufferings of her babe, shut her door at once and for ever against her neighbours, being of that charity which in most cases is extreme, but has its moments of becoming adamant. Only when, some days later, she clasped Tristram once more to her bosom, and, to the child's tender astonishment, lifting up her voice, wept over him, did any degree of comfort return to her. Finding that her babe loved her as of old, she was able at last to forgive herself the thing for which nobody else blamed her.

Miss Doris Foley, arriving late in the afternoon, found Tristram on terms of intimacy with an elderly gentleman of homely looks, bearing a distinguished name. She fluttered into apologetic speeches, holding the child clasped in her arms; for the rapture at having hold of her was very great, and not easy to be assuaged.

"You are fond of him?" smiled the celebrity, when the child had been packed out of the room for the two to talk over his escapade.

"Oh, am I not!" cried the lady, hugging the memory of but just finished endearments.

"I have spent the day turning him inside out, while we awaited your coming," said the Sage. "'Tis a dear laddie, promising to have a shapely mind if life and time will allow."

"Oh, he is healthy!" she made anxious protest.

"Yes?" admitted the other with interrogation. "But things affect him curiously. Youth in health ought not to have nerves like that. He has had a fright; and it is as if he had had an illness. Sane I should certainly call him; but all his nature is quick to be up and off in alarms and excursions. Life exhausts him. You will see him sleeping like a top to-night — I wish it could be here, for I am loth to lose him." He returned to the thought presently, saying, "Could I prevail upon you at no notice to accept an old bachelor's invitation for the night? I have a home-made housekeeper very much at your service."

The lady shook her head, smiling; the honour of it alarmed her. Her eyes beamed softly in gratitude as she pressed her refusal; for here indeed was a wonderful new addition to Tristram's conquests. She was proud of her boy, and saw that she might babble of him. Two enthusiasts talked, dove-tailing their eager sentences; he had only a day's doings to retail — he gave it full of laughter; she, a short lifetime.

"Oh, excellent, excellent!" cried he, watching how devotion in her was balanced by insight and roguish management of an innocent sinner; "his aunt is worthy of him!"

"Oh, high praise!" said she; "may I live to deserve it!"

"Only let him live his life confidently, and do you keep yourself in his confidence; he will be safe then. Be the leash which he will never have to be aware of. Your name should be Cynthia, I think; you remember the poem: —

> 'Oh, huntress soul, with leash and thong,
> Keep and control these hands and feet!' —

and the rest; that is your task—a happy one, I think it."

When she was starting to carry her precious handful away with her, the Sage said, "If he should ever ask to come and see me again, do not be afraid of troubling me; let him come! I like to have a will-o'-the-wisp dancing over my old bones." He gave his hand to Tristram gravely upon the moment of parting; and all at once the child became shy and constrained, finding their affectionate union disturbed. "It seems you keep them all for your aunt now!" smiled his host, wickedly laying the burden upon him. The child's confidence came back at a rush. "Yes, yes! Only don't choke me!" protested the old man, depositing him in the carriage by the side of his lady-love.

Even upon the way Tristram slept well, snuggling closely into the warmth of that adored companionship; nor had he full consciousness again until, late the next morning, he woke to find Marcia prancing in night-gown attire, upon his bed, and calling out to him in funny French ways of speech. In five minutes they ceased to be strangers, and Tristram was realising his

sudden growth that made him, at least in physical things, the leader, where before he had only been the follower. The physical race between them was already over; but it was to be years before Marcia lost her mental supremacy.

Among the elders talk went chiefly about Tristram's capture of a splendid celebrity, whose fame ran to the ends of the earth, but whose door was shut so closely against the ordinary inroads of society. Word of it went to Mrs. Gavney, still gathering up health in foreign parts, and unable as yet to travel; and she, writing almost as a stranger, enquired wistfully about this indefinable charm which drew people toward the younger of her two offsprings. Her letters failed not every week to bring from her sister Doris replies in a devout strain; for to that lady the famous man's friendship, so readily accorded, was a crowning proof, if any were needed, that her boy was all that she declared of him.

And while Tristram's scape-grace charms had drawn to him this large conquest, record should not be missed of homage rendered from a much humbler quarter. The new home to which he was soon going seemed too far away for the fond ageing bosom that had nursed him. After their last parting Mrs. Harbour's heart-strings were strained to cracking point; also by asperity of demeanour she had made herself neighbourless. So one day she moved herself and her few belongings into a green court, which lay behind the main street of Bembridge, the post-town two miles distant from Tristram's new home. And there, shaping garments of a rather nondescript cut, she tailored for him till the convention of school-days rescued him from her amorous stitchings. Her woollens and knittings followed him through life, and the last garment she worked for him was made when her eyes were nearly as blind as Love's own, and was never seen by him.

CHAPTER V

REAL CHARACTERS AND FICTITIOUS PERSONS

THE reader will by this time be perceiving that what is to be told here is history and not fiction. A hero of romance at five or six years of age it not too young to start on a life of manly adventure. In the "Rule Britannia" school of fiction we find dauntless midshipmites showing their first teeth to an affrighted foe, and shouting their country's war-cries in treble tones. Given a hero who, before his seventh year, has broken from leading strings and cleared himself for action and a life of "over the hills and far away," no writer of fiction will sacrifice the situation and return him the very next day to the dull rounds of domesticity.

Here, however, are we already upon anti-climax: life takes the Tramp back almost to the point whence he first started. He comes, with but a slight shift of locality, to his new home, a house set in terraced grounds, overlooking a broad valley whose woody knolls and rising pasture-lands shut away from view the not far distant market-town of Bembridge. Over a broad roll of hill westward hang the dark edges of Randogger, wood-lands which will play a deep part in the story to follow. Below them run on a lower level the ups and downs of a rich arable tract whose well-clipped boundaries witness by common features to a single ownership.

Between Hill Alwyn, the "place" of the locality, and

Little Alwyn and Long Alwyn, its rural appendages, there was no house of standing to disturb the social seclusion of the district, save the one in which the Gavneys now found themselves. All round lay a delectable country, whose only drawback was the privacy which stood erected across so many by-ways attractive to the eye, a thing altogether inconvenient to one in whom ere long the lust of the eye was to become the ruling passion. How he adapted himself to those impediments will be seen later.

The Gavney family was still waiting for the maternal presence to make it complete. Marcia talked much to Tristram of their mother in those days, and was restless for the day when she might show to each other the two between whom, from more recent intercourse, she felt herself in a way the connecting link. Being jealous for Tristram to feel as she did, she raged to find him so satisfied with his Aunt Doris. She averred that their mother was far more beautiful: he as stoutly denied it. It was their continual and long-standing quarrel.

Mr. Gavney appeared among them only at a late hour of the day or for brief week-ends. Preoccupied with affairs and fretted by the absence of his wife, he took but small pleasure in the new home and its surroundings. In those first days the children came little into his society. Marcia, who claimed proprietary rights over him until her mother's return, knew him best by the patterns upon his waistcoats, against which she would compulsorily come to be nursed. Tristram, on such occasions, would cuddle down into another lap spread open to him; and the two children would correspond silently by eye-signal, while the talk of the elders went on over their heads.

Doris Foley assured her brother-in-law in reply to his enquiries that she was not dull; her visit to install

and look after the new *ménage* she declared to be a pleasure.

"But society — you get none. Until we have Anna here, naturally the neighbourhood delays."

"Oh, people from Bembridge are calling."

"Ah, yes; that one would expect. But there is Lady Petwyn." His voice paused interrogatively over the name.

"Lady Petwyn has not called," said his sister-in-law.

"No: as I say; she waits, I have no doubt, to hear of Anna's return."

"I should be sorry if she did otherwise," said his companion, and started to draw a blithe picture of her doings with the two children.

He objected that it was time now for them to be under regular tuition. She pleaded the beauty of the summer days for a respite, adding, "I assure you they are learning; every day I teach them something." But she acquiesced when the date for a new order of things was fixed upon. "Only three weeks more!" she sighed, "then we will go picnicking to-morrow!"

They visited the great Randoggers, and came home in a violent fall of the weather, which, when it was over, seemed to have carried green-hearted summer away with it, and to have started the withering autumnal tints. A few days later Mr. Gayney was hurrying away to bring his wife back from the South, to whom went also a letter from Doris, worded with welcome, and touching on the changes her sister would find, coming after long absence to new home and surroundings.

"Marcia," wrote her correspondent, "you will find all on tiptoe; absence stiffens her affections. She is absolutely dogged: loves you and the Tramp, and, I believe, no other thing. Just as she had hankerings after him when abroad with us, so now she has hankerings after

you, and is jealously striving to work up Trampy to the same state. As for him, you will have for a time not to be jealous of me: he has been making much of me — for lack of you, and his small heart-strings are all entangled; you will get them back quickly enough, and then *I* shall be desolate.

"He came upon me the other day with my hair down. 'Oh, Auntie Dorrie, how beautiful you are!' he cried. It's a real romance; the wee one was almost in tears. He makes me sing to him, too, on all occasions — the other day for an hour in the rain, under dripping boughs. I must tell you about that, for it connects with a queer notion that has got into my head about him. There's a knowingness, a sort of weather-cock wisdom he has, which is almost uncanny: it came out comically the very day I refer to. We were off on a picnicking jaunt, under a blue sky, which seemed to have no end to it. Just at the start Trampy was missing. I am never for waiting, so I whistled him and went on. Presently he comes after, dragging a great water-proof, for *me*, if you please, and *would* bring it! I laughed at him; but before the day's end, we were all under it, and thankful for the shelter.

"And that's the creature who himself likes to get wet! My Nannette remembers where in the world he was during the insufferable heat and drought of that one summer she and I spent in France; how you lay and gasped for air so many weary hours of each day; till one evening late the heavens were moved, and you thanked God and got to bed in haste, while Pierre rode off for the doctor through a night loud with rain. The last thing you said to me was, 'Is it raining still?'

"It never stopped all that night. I remember also how on his return Pierre waited drenched for two whole hours in order to have safe news of you, before going off

to his own home. Poor people take to you, my dear, and your boy has the same gift of winning them; but he tramps over all sorts and conditions; even birth and intellect are not safe from the spell of him. *A propos:* I prophecy that Lady Petwyn will come calling on *him* some day: she has not yet done so on me, your proxy. Beresford is alarming himself on the subject. You know how, if he gets a thing on his mind, he fusses over it. Better persuade him you want no formidable callers. I hear she is a crank, of aldermanic origin, no aristocrat — married a bad specimen of the breed, and disembarrassed the estates, which have now become hers. She is a recently confirmed widow, and, they say, a jubilant one; walks lame, rides in defiance of orders: there is all I know about her."

A letter which touched lightly over the many interests of the new neighbourhood, wound up with a return to family topics, and a last mention of the two children. "They are sitting together now on the terrace steps," she wrote, "hatching mischief, by the look of them, which will probably mean mud-heaps for me before bedtime. Their little back-views send you much love."

Among the thick of her correspondence Doris Foley had before her eyes as she wrote fresh proof of Tristram's conquest of "intellect." Less than a month's waiting had brought from the Sage a letter, whimsically pathetic, begging not to be dropped. Naming the Tramp, it was apparent he meant both. She burned humbly in reply to do him the honours of her own house, as soon as ever she could return to Little Towberry. "Whenever you can come, the boy shall be with me," she wrote, and begged for a day to be named. Looking out, she saw the two small back-views still in position, and wondered what the plot could be which kept them so long sedentary.

Tristram and Marcia were at the moment deep in a comparison of experiences. Of the two, though Tristram might be the romantic one, Marcia was the romancer. She saw life out of a level eye, and for her age was a stern thinker; within her were the makings of a rigorously truthful character, but the time for truth of that quality had not arrived in the seventh year of her conscience's up-bringing: merely did it leaven her grim powers of invention to be very logical and circumspect, as the present instance will show.

Tristram was hearing from Marcia the true story of her life; and as the narrative went in sombre phrase, as an unpleasant duty having to be done, he without a quiver of suspicion drew into his brain a vision of her fitting well enough with his own vague inspirations and dreams.

Marcia began by asking him if he had not noticed her to be different on some days from others; had she not looked sulkier and prettier now and again? Tristram thought it over, and was ready to be sure he had.

Marcia having her quarry up and on the run, drove him nimbly down the ways of her will. She bid him know the reason.

"I'm two different people," she declared; "one of them is me and the other isn't."

"Which of them isn't you?" asked Tristram.

"The sulky and pretty one." That one, she told him, came and took her place during the recurring periods of her absence; and the likeness between them was so close that even fathers and aunts were taken in by it.

Tristram questioned why she had to go away at all.

Marcia plucked for him the heart of her mystery. "It's because," said she, "I've got two fathers and two mothers. Even when father and mother are both here, I've still another father and mother living somewhere

else; and when they want me, they send the other girl to take my place, and she's so like me it doesn't matter — nobody finds out the difference."

Tristram wanted to know, with the beginnings of a small jealousy in the matter, why she had two fathers and mothers.

"Oh," said Marcia, "it's the way I was born; they knew I was going to be troublesome, so they gave me two. You need a lot of fathers and mothers when you are naughty."

"But I'm just as naughty as you!" cried Tristram, in protest, at finding himself so much of an orphan.

"Oh no, you are not! And there's children naughtier than me, too. Where I and mamma were, there was a little girl who used to go about with three mothers. She wanted me to exchange with her, but I wouldn't, because my own mother wanted me."

"How often do you go away?" he enquired, intent on waylaying and accompanying her at her next flitting.

"I go every week," said Marcia. "I've got to go away to-day. The next time you see me it won't be me at all; it will be the other one."

Tristram became all agog for the appointed hour. Misery at the thought of losing her, determination not to let her go, made him staunch in his refusals of her request that he would run on a small errand indoors for her: walking-boots were the things she wanted. Presently, vowing that she must be gone, if unutterable woes were to be avoided, she shed real tears over him, kissed him, and cried good-bye! She begged him to be good to the other one for her sake; then, with a resolute push, sent him tumbling down the steps to the grass-patch below, and made away at full speed through the shrubbery, in the direction of the fowl-pens.

The Tramp gathered himself up, and went after her;

his excitable small body shook with sobs that choked him as he ran. When he got round to the back premises, the fugitive was no longer in sight. He butted himself against the first door, and finding it would not open, beat lamentably upon it. Then he ranged the premises in all directions for half-an-hour, searching in vain for traces of the missing one. Presently he heard a voice, not quite Marcia's, cooeying to him from a far-away spot in the back-gardens. That way he went in all haste, and there found Marcia sitting demurely among the currant bushes, her lips stained by the red of the fruit, and looking, to be sure, prettier and sulkier than as he had last seen her.

He drew near with a sort of awe, spying to find more strangeness in her. She eyed him aslant, and nodded over a mouthful, saying never a word.

"Is it you?" he asked at last, "or are you the other one?"

Marcia threw a full stare at him. "I don't know what you mean!" was her first parrying answer.

"I mean, are you Marcia; or are you the girl that comes to take her place when her other home wants her?"

At that the other swung herself round with an air of being wonderfully startled. "Do you mean to say she told you?" cried the new Marcia. "Why, she could be put to death for doing that!"

"Oh, but I won't tell!" cried Tristram; "you mustn't either."

"No; for if we were to, she would never be allowed to come back again. If you want to see her again, you must promise never to say that she has told you!"

The promise given, Tristram began to examine his new companion soberly; he looked her over from top to toe, up into her eyes, and under her chin. "How like you are!" he said at last. "When you come, do you have to change clothes?"

"No," she answered; "we have dresses made alike for our going-away days."

He asked her, next, what her real name was.

"Georgiana," she told him; "but here I have to be Marcia."

Tristram thought that funny. "Georgiana," said he, "is Marcia's favourite name."

After thinking for a little she answered, "Marcia's mine," adding, "I'd give anything to be Marcia!" a remark which showed that Georgiana was at present but an implement in Marcia's hands, an underling to her stronger personality.

"Are her other father and mother good to her?" was Tristram's next question.

"Oh yes! but they are very poor; they can't afford to keep her as well dressed as she is when she is here."

Tristram fell into deep thought: presently it came into his head to say: "Has she any brothers or sisters?"

"Of course," said the cunning Georgiana; "she has a brother there exactly like you."

The Tramp's intellect fidgeted under this new fact. "Why doesn't he come here, then, and change with me?" he enquired.

"Because," said Georgiana, "he is always so ill: he's lame, too, and can't walk. She goes there to nurse him; so do I when it's my turn."

Tristram was thinking that he knew now where his old clothes must go to. But a fresh idea drove him abruptly to enquire, "Don't you ever get punished for things she has done the day you change places?"

"If I do," said the other grimly, "I pay her out when my turn comes; that's quite easy."

"Aren't you fond of her?" asked Tristram rather wistfully, wondering how he was to divide into two his own affection for Marcia.

Georgiana's answer to that was: "You see, I hardly ever meet her; we are always having to be in different places."

The story took a long telling, for many details of deception had to be gone through. Marcia-Georgiana played her part with the utmost gravity, and Tristram took it all in, and never murmured; he gazed enchanted upon this new sister, who was prettier and sulkier than the old one, and who had a small lame brother exactly like himself. For many days afterwards his heart yearned toward his afflicted double, whom he was never to see; at night he dreamed of him, and would sometimes in his waking hours play at being lame, with Georgiana looking on serious and unamused.

Now from this incident those who live by the letter rather than by the spirit, will conclude that there was not much to choose morally between the Marcia Gavney of this chapter, and the Sally Tracy of a previous one. Like priests in the dark ages, both of them bore rule by their means; but to a different end. The effect of the story on Tristram was strange: he loved Georgiana better than the old Marcia; and Marcia herself, when she returned, better than both.

When she returned: for, a few days afterwards, Marcia came running up to him from nowhere, and throwing her arms round his neck, "I've come back again, Trampy!" she cried, "I'm Marcia. How did you like Georgiana?"

Tristram owned that he saw but a shade of difference between them; unless, may be, the other were a little bit the taller.

"Ah, yes!" Marcia seized on the admission. "They are getting rather anxious about that at my other home. She is growing so fast that they are beginning to be afraid of sending her in my place for fear of being found out."

In course of time Georgiana was allowed to grow so fast that Marcia could no longer be exchanged with safety: the legend seemed to be dying a natural death. Yet more than a year went by before Tristram was sufficiently advanced to say doubtfully: —

"Marcie, was it true what you used to tell me about your changing places with Georgiana?"

Marcia herself had grown fast in the last year. She turned on him an eye of fierce sorrow. "Oh, Tris, why did you ask me that? Marcia died while she was at her other home a year ago. I'm Georgiana; I'm taking her place for good and all now." Possessive instinct prompted her to add: "He's dead too: Chris, I mean, — the poor little lame boy. They were buried the same day."

And from that position all Tristram's arguments, exhortations and denials could not bring her to budge. It were shame to say how long afterwards he still carried about with him a vague ghostly belief that the story might have been a true one, after all. Even when he stood clear in his teens his faith in Marcia's consistency kept life; and he knew that had he questioned her again on the subject of that foolish, childish fable, she would have turned on him a steady eye as of old, and answered under a sense of honourable obligation, "I am Georgiana."

CHAPTER VI

TRISTRAM'S HEART HAS ITS GROWING PAINS

THE day during which Mrs. Gavney's return was waited for, proved one of constant bickerings and peace-makings between brother and sister. Marcia awoke unnaturally bright, with a fixed eye. She raged over the delays in her dressing, grudging Tristram his turns. To his babble of scatter-brained remarks about all the things he would have to say and show when their mother was with them, she opposed a harsh doubt, whether they would be seeing her at all that day. Steeling herself for disappointment she said, "I'm sure she won't come!" and reiterated it with such a parade of gloomy conviction, that Tristram flew off in scared appeal to his Aunt Doris. He triumphed back to the nursery with his expectations confirmed. "She *is* coming," he cried; "Auntie Dorrie says so!"

For that Marcia slapped his face. They fought, and had to be divided.

An hour later Marcia raided his solitude; kissed him, declared that she loved him, and flew out again. After a time they were loosed once more into each other's company, but could not agree in their differences. Tristram was for being happy with his playthings. Encamped in a general litter of them, his own and hers mixed, he began whispering to all that had ears or insides wherewith to hear, news of the great event which was at hand.

Marcia made a jealous swoop, picked out those which were her separate property, and packed them severely back into their cupboard.

There remained to become a bone of contention an article in which they held common ownership; Tristram was for keeping it out, Marcia for having it in. They broke it in the struggles which put a close to arguments; a useless piece of it went into the cupboard; Tristram kept possession of the equally useless remains. "This is *my* half!" he said, and played with it.

They were summoned from a state of rumbling hostility to their morning's airing. Their Aunt Doris was busy over household preparations, and to have the nurse as her substitute, made the exercise definitely distasteful. Marcia wished to know where they were going and rebelled, being sure now that her mother would arrive prematurely in their absence. Tristram begged for the Bembridge road, so that in any case they might meet her; and the concession was granted him. It left Marcia without a grievance, but with a temper that showed itself in a staid deportment during the whole of their walk. While Tristram ranged, she followed the nurse at heel just too distant for conversation. Seeing cows coming, of which she had a dread, she remembered that the road was her brother's choosing, and said to herself, "So, if they toss me, it will be Trampy's fault!" They did not: before the cattle came much nearer Tristram remembered her weakness; he trotted back and slipped his hand into hers. She gave him an affectionate squeeze, and they were better friends for a while. Nevertheless it remained for her a day of sharp edges, and companionship was the thing which proved least suited to her complaint.

During the afternoon they played in the garden; but before long she took refuge in her pet climbing-tree and would not come down. Tristram made daring climbs in

her neighbourhood to heights he had never aimed at before, but could not tempt her to a following.

He left her at last, and they did not meet again till tea-time. Over their cups and cake they fell into a conciliatory mood: word had come by telegram that Mrs. Gavney was really on the way, but to arrive an hour later than timed. They feasted on certainty: Tristram's brain became crowded with plans. "Mayn't we," he demanded, "go along the road and meet her, before any one else does?"

Restraint was set upon any such highway attack on a tired traveller. Marcia looked across at him with an eye that spoke volumes; but when the meal was over she avoided his signals, had her bib unfastened, and went hastily out of the room.

Tristram roamed about to catch sight of his Aunt Doris, whom he had hardly seen that day. He fell upon her at the store-closets, and starting impatient enquiries as to how many hours longer he would have to wait, was warned when the time came to be more gentle in his raptures: those romping attacks of affection, delightful to her, would not do where convalescent nerves were concerned: "Take them up tenderly, lift them with care!" explained Doris, thinking of her tired sister's arrival.

"Will she be afraid of me?" queried Tristram.

"No no!" cried the dear lady, "who could be!" She let herself be hugged, and ordered the boy off: "Go and find Marcia, and be ready when the time comes!"

"We are both ready now," he declared; but his nurse thought differently; he was caught on the run, and put through the process of washing and clean-collaring it had been his plan to avoid. His sister had been beforehand in submitting to the inevitable: there were no signs of her in the nursery when he went up. His impatience to get down and out again, brought on him only a cajoling

measure of reproof: so near now was the moment for which all the household stood in expectation.

At the sound of carriage wheels from a distance, just before dusk, Tristram cried out for Marcia, and ran in a flutter of haste to search out the missing link of his happiness. One of the servants had seen Miss Marcia going down the drive.

He scurried out to overtake her, and was shouting "Marcia!" as the brougham emerged upon the sweep at the front. Marcia's head came serenely out of the carriage-window; her face was flushed with happiness.

"She's in here, Trampy! She's in here! Come and look at her!" was the invitation flung out to him.

Tristram jumped up on to the step, and saw vague things within.

"My boy!" cried a sweet voice, "my boy!" His father's arms lifted him across the sill; from a corner of the shadowy interior a pale face smiled at him, bringing sudden memories. Tumbling to be clasped, he heard another voice, Marcia's, saying, "This is Trampy." Out of breath he felt a heart under his — tears that were not his own, flowing warm over his cheeks; and twisting his mouth free to whisper that he was glad, saw eyes strange and familiar, and Marcia, with a fast hold on them both, lean down her face to join theirs. They embraced all three together; mists were on Tristram; he kissed mother and sister, scarcely knowing them apart till the carriage drew up. There waiting her turn to come in and be kissed he saw his dear Aunt Lady-love, and with a great cry of affection, threw himself on her too, as though fearing lest new love had been a sort of treason to the old.

When welcomings were over, Marcia alone had dry eyes. Yet that night she was the one that lay wakeful and cried of her happiness.

The next morning an early awakening moved Tristram

to go and tap at his Aunt Doris's door and make plea for admittance. Sweet sleepy speech bade him enter. "You!" she cried, surprised, as he frolicked up to her bedside and crouched for an invitation to spring in. She opened her arms through a sea of golden-brown locks. "Jump!" cried she: and he, nestling his ear in the soft frills under his lady's chin, cried, "Sing!" and purred for the notes to follow.

She sang to him of Cock Robin; "And, why do you listen like that?" she asked him. "Oh, I like to hear it in the tunnel before it comes out!" was the explanation given her to laugh at.

He made love to her in funny quaint speeches, and fluttered to let her see she was loved to-day as much as yesterday; but could not put himself into words. She talked to him of his mother; he, listening with grave attention, asked, "Is she going to be well now?" and was troubled not to get a more sure answer. In his mind, so susceptible to emotions of pity, a tender filial devotion had begun toward that mother who was ever to remain a sort of stranger to him: a piety evoked by the frailty of a body aged before its time, and destined never to renew its youth or feel again the joy of unhindered health.

"You, Auntie Dorrie, are always quite well, are you not?" he asked, eyeing her dear beauty.

"Oh, quite, quite, quite!" she cried, with a sudden shoot of colour to her cheeks.

She started talking to him of his old man, the Sage, and of the promised return visit which she hoped to arrange. Would Trampy come? Indeed, and would he not! The mere mention was enough to spring fondness to his memories of that one day's acquaintance: she could not tell him fast enough a tithe of the things he wished breathlessly to know. And this remained characteristic

of the boy all through life: utterly contented though he might seem with present surroundings to be reminded in absence of those he loved gave him a curious restlessness, a disturbed sense that he had been remiss toward their claims on him. It seemed to him always, then, that he had never yet loved them as they deserved; and if some had reason at times to think him the most forgetful of lovers, they found him at others astonishingly the most grateful. Doris Foley spoke of him with some insight in regard to his friendships, when she declared that his heart was a thorn working through his body in all directions, and constantly coming out at his sleeve; and the Sage, who had a weakness for finding truth and beauty eternally united, gave extravagant praise to a saying that came from lips so fair. "Almost the only wise things I hear now-a-days come from the young!" he declared. "I am finding young people the best book of wisdom for my old age."

"Ah! but I am no longer young," sighed the lady.

"Twenty-five, I should judge," he answered, "if I may be allowed to put Time's cage round you."

"You are generous: you have spared me two whole years in your reckoning!" was her reply. "But I judge of age by looking forward, not by looking back. I shall never be very old; and therefore I have ceased to be very young." She smiled gaily, adding, "I have lived one of the happiest lives I know, and still live it! Surely you can judge of that, who sighed just now for jealousy of me over Trampy's ways of giving us our 'good-nights'! He loves you well enough; but I am his first romance. I shall die with that in my proud possession."

This was the lady whose sense of the fleetingness of things expressed itself so well in the sigh uttered just a month before: "Only three weeks! then we will go picnicking to-morrow."

Little Towberry lay but four miles on the other side of Bembridge, or six from the Valley House, and the goings to and fro between the two homes were frequent. Even Mrs. Gavney, before the cold of winter came to make her a prisoner within doors, could drive over the distance, stay a night, and return on the next day. It was thus that she came, with Tristram under her weak wing, for the day that brought the great Sage to her sister's roof.

Mr. Beresford Gavney came also from his place of business in Sawditch, and at first in the presence of Tristram's celebrity showed less ease than did his wife and sister-in-law. It was with difficulty that Miss Foley, during dinner, kept him from talking "county," that height toward which he furtively aimed, and from which his women-kind, with a better sense of fitness, strove to keep him retired.

"If Beresford would only take a pride in the wheels he himself runs on, and have less of a wish to run behind other people's, what a happy man of business he might be!" his sister-in-law had said in early days when she knew him less well than now. She had struck at once on the weakest point of a character, whose surfaces did not fairly correspond to the merits underneath. Mr. Gavney was a discontented man of business, vain of his capacity, ashamed of his calling. As a young man succeeding to the business which his father had founded, he had sacrificed some of the goodwill that a fixed appellation carries, lest his name should stand connected with the sources of his income. He now traded as a firm, a device by which few were deceived, and outside business hours nervously avoided all mention of the commodities and processes about which he knew most. "Beresford always stops short at the point where he could become informing!" was another of his sister-in-law's small

shafts. But it would be a mistake to think that she had no affection for the man whom she thus probed with slight ridicule. Before her sister she was always careful to spare him; spoke warmly indeed, and had cause, for he was a devoted and impeccable spouse.

"It is a mercy," she declared to others of her family, "that in spite of appearances his heart does not run entirely to waistcoat; under that patterned exterior there's a pattern of a man. Anna is never quite happy when she's without him, and never quite unhappy when with him. Can one say much more when the poor health she has cuts her off from the more active enjoyments of life? He is a man I like genuinely whenever I see him with her; and respect always when he does not try to make himself respected outside his limitations."

"Positively, I could be thankful sometimes, if he would drop one of those carefully held 'H's' of his!" was a complaint the same friendly on-looker made against his manner of going into society.

Mr. Gavney had looked forward with flattered trepidation to the half-hour's *tête-à-tête* with a great celebrity which the wine after dinner would secure him, and had laid up stock of polite conversation which he hoped might put them at ease one with another. He emerged at the end of that period of promised felicity with a scared feeling of satisfaction over the impression he had made, but a lowered sense of the Sage's gentility. He had talked — well, he believed; but on what topics?

Doris, when the two reappeared, sent her brother-in-law a smile of amused interrogation. "How did you get on?" the smile seemed to say; "And if well, — as by the look of you, — then, how so?"

Mr. Gavney had nothing that his lips could impart. Was he to go over to his sister-in-law and own that against his will he had been talking informingly on the

one subject he knew thoroughly, and had found genius most meanly interested in it, for all the world like a shopman? He glowed over the proceeding, and blushed with shame. Where had he placed himself socially in the great man's estimation, he wondered. Had they met to talk factory? All that talk had been wrung from him; he was for dismissing it quickly from his thoughts.

But the Sage having tasted at the fresh springs of knowledge, was hardly ready as yet to relinquish the topic. "Miss Foley," he cried, "I have come from so much good wine and so much good instruction, that they have, between them, almost atoned to me for the absence of my hostess. I am refreshed and informed. I am on better terms with the habiliments I live in; I feel myself larger: my intelligence passes into the shell which encloses me. Until to-day I was packed like a parcel; now my garb is a part of me; cloth has a real meaning to me at last; — Mr. Gavney has been expounding everything and with the modesty of a master ——"

He got no further; Beresford Gavney's modesty mastered all further speech of it. He became eager to know if his sister's guest had yet heard a voice that her family was proud of.

"It is one of those things I have come for!" cried the Sage. "If you are readers of Mr. Browning's poems you will remember that one which deals with both these things together — textiles and song: Tyrian purple, the cloth of kings, and the porridge of John Keats. In literature 'purple patches' we say; the two lend terms to explain each other. Mr. Gavney, I come to be shown your works the first fine day; only promise that I see none of your fair young factory girls dipped in the blues: no Plutonian Proserpines, I beg of you!"

Mr. Gavney in care for his wife was able to cover his embarrassment. He craved leave that she might with-

draw; she already looked tired, he told her; still half an invalid, she was under orders to observe early hours, positively must go. He apologised, and with fond, fussy solicitude led her out of the room.

"A proud man; it is pretty to see them," remarked the Sage, when the door closed on the retiring pair. "An honest man, too, I take him to be."

Doris, smiling, laid her hand on his arm. "He has," said she, "two best sides to his character; now you have seen him in both. He is a good husband and a good man of business. But I must beg you, if you would let him be comfortable, not to pursue your subject when he returns; business makes him blush." She added, "Did you talk to him at all of our boy?"

"A little," said the old man, "but they seem to be strangers. *Our* boy, as we see him, appears to be almost unknown to him."

"That is going to be the tragedy," she murmured. "Yes, and with my sister it is the same. But you see his dear nature; he picks up fathers and mothers as he goes along." Her smile adopted him to a share in the spiritual relationship. She crossed to the piano, and sang to ravished old ears. Her voice filled up the rest of the evening, preserving to her brother-in-law the good impression he had created. He and the Sage parted cordially; but no fine day ever brought that invitation to view the dye-works and cloth-making for which the other had bargained.

This was the first of a series of meetings under Doris Foley's roof between a trio of lovers. The offer used to be hung over the Tramp's head shamelessly, as a bribe to industry; and he would wriggle patiently through a week of hard sittings at sums and words of two syllables, for the sure prospect of his two dear delights waiting to give him joy at the end of it.

Marcia went also at first, from a curiosity to see this wonderful being of whom Tristram raved. She settled not to like him, because of a quizzical look his blue eyes had when they turned on her, and because Tristram lavished on him an intimacy of affection which she considered unseemly when bestowed outside the family circle.

She found fault with his ways. "Why does he go like that?" — she imitated an uncouth habit the Sage had of looking down the arm-hole of each sleeve in turn, like a bird when it preens its wings. "And why does he put 'r.r.r.r.' into everything he says?" — she made a mock of his north-country accent. In everything about him she found something to object to, fighting hard against an instinct which told her he was lovable. She offered him no more than an abrupt hand-shake after witnessing the Tramp's warmer demonstrations of welcome, and in all ways was stiff and priggish, with a determination not to be liked. After their one meeting she chose to imagine that her mother was too ill to spare her — for it was but once that Mrs. Gavney was able to be of the party — and would beg off more often than not, after her going had been thought settled.

Behind her back the Sage spoke of her with waggish awe, and revelled in Tristram's tales of her great wisdom. Marcia would listen in a fever for report of any crumbs of his speech that had reference to her; and having secured them, professed utter indifference as to what he thought or said. "Between me and your Marcia, there will only be a death-bed reconciliation," prophesied the Sage. "The question is, which of us shall bring it about by making haste to die?"

Marcia pondered the saying deeply. All she said was, "I think he is a silly old man." Her feelings were hurt; his charity was merely a way of putting her in the wrong.

To have one of his adorations thus unappreciated was to Tristram like the discovery of a defect in his own character; he kept trying to put it right; the more Marcia objected to his idol, the more she brought in argument to her side.

After a quarrel, she was always specially demonstrative of her love for him. She ran gloriously, and climbed better than he; in swarming, short skirts give a grip. He was the better kangaroo; Marcia excelled as a monkey.

She had one climbing-tree of her very own; the Tramp never came into it without leave; many reconciliations between the two took place there. He had his own climbing-tree also, but of that she was made free without any conditions at all; he had not the gift of exclusiveness which, in her, grew to so fine an edge.

One day well on in winter, Tristram alone was sent over to Little Towberry, and found cousins old and young — the Sage amongst them, at his sociable best, dispelling the awe which gathered when his name was pronounced. In a corner, not looking well, sat the beautiful Aunt Doris; she who was generally the centre. The child spied at her, and questioned. She patted his mouth to stop all foolish, tender enquiries, and became gay when presently the Sage's mastery of the revels had thrown the whole company into merriment.

Tristram vibrated between his two stars, a giddy meteor never to be held still. It was the dressing-bell ringing for his elders that skurried him to bed late.

His beloved had forgotten to sing to him; he called out to her as she went down to dinner. She peeped in at him beautifully arrayed.

"No time now, my Tramp; afterwards I will, if you are still awake. But you will find me a bird without a voice — no coo, all croak!"

She ran away and forgot one, with whom bed meant, touch the pillow and it is to-morrow. She never dreamed of his keeping awake.

It is what he did. Waiting wide-eyed till social sounds ascended once more from the drawing-room, he expected to hear her voice at the piano, and would have gone to sleep upon that. But from singing when her visitor preferred a petition to that end, Doris excused herself. She blamed her throat and the weather; but her face, in spite of smiles, showed distress.

Two hours after, she was dragging herself to bed, more tired than she knew. Tristram's little voice called her to him. "My song, Auntie Dorrie, my song!" he whimpered, almost aggrieved.

"Oh, Trampy, you poor, wakeful little imp!" she cried, full of ruth at having forgotten him. She took him up and let his head go where it loved to nestle. Twice she tried: then sang.

Tristram heard the beautiful notes thrown high, break quavering and come down with a sob; there was a soft ripping sound and stillness. Doris let herself fall back under the child's weight into the bed his body had made warm. She lay motionless. He clawed at her in the dark; and, at her breast, where her closed hands were, felt crumpled paper.

Without knowing it, he had touched the tragedy of Doris Foley's life. It was then but a day old.

The next morning she kissed him from her bed, though it was mid-day when he came to bid her good-bye. Her smile was ravishingly sweet to him — yet he felt guilty. Had he, he wondered, done her some injury.

The week could not pass without an exchange of letters between the two. At the end of it he came to be reassured, found a bright face waiting for him, and the old Auntie Dorrie quite renovated, with not a difference

that he could discover. She sang him his songs at first asking, and deceived him thoroughly as to her state. Marcia was in their company, and the three had the house to themselves. "I sent all my visitors away in a bundle last week!" said Miss Foley. It suggested brown paper to Tristram, and on his return home, he had himself delivered absurdly at his mother's door in a huge parcel done about with strings. Marcia helped at the untying, and there was much merriment and kissing when the crackling had been removed. "We made mother laugh," was the report Tristram had to send back.

CHAPTER VII

ARBOREAL CHILDHOOD

A FEW weeks later Doris Foley was again at the Valley House, and owned that it would be for something more than a short stay. "I want you and my boy with your belongings, and not a thing in the way of visitors!" she said to her sister, and having shut up her home at Little Towberry, declared that she felt relieved of all care.

Her hands became in reality more full than when she was merely her own mistress; taking over the housekeeping of an establishment which taxed too heavily Mrs. Gavney's frail energies, she had enough to think and do. Knowing herself welcome, she claimed to be a defending providence to the family. "If I could not have come," was her argument, "it would have been a case of sending for Julia Gavney; you may choose between us yet! That last letter of hers reads peckishly; 'tis like a benevolent bird of prey she hovers over you!"

"Julia is good; but she is too managing," said Mrs. Gavney, "and Beresford gratified me by saying that I should find you the better companion." It was the dear lady's way to put on the chains of her husband's authority as articles of adornment. "These are my jewels!" she seemed to say, and would quote his opinions on quite slight matters; it saved her a world of thinking; these decisions of life she left gladly to others. In this instance

Mr. Gavney was glad that his wife's favourite sister should be with her. In spite of a ten years' difference in their ages, the two fitted companionably together; nor was he unmindful of that social charm for which Doris, of all the Foleys, stood first. Across the valley Hill Alwyn stood out to view; quite likely was it that his very presentable sister-in-law might be of use in bringing the two houses to a neighbourly footing.

Coming between the children and the jarred nerves of her invalid sister, Miss Foley was a relief to both sides. She allowed her charges to run more wild than was generally told; the neighbourhood got to know them, a fast-stepping trio, with wide-awake voices, and always in full spirits over the business on hand. Their walks took adventurous shapes, and sent them home, often a little more weary than was well. Making a fairly wide range over the country, they touched, when time allowed, the dark borders of Randogger, counting their miles roughly by the brooks which moistened the dip of each green valley. Woodsides just then were beginning to break into soft flower; overhead were larch trees, rushing into a spurt of green and knobs of red blossom; catkins came tumbling like a plague of caterpillars from the black poplars along the roads; pushed out of place by the turbulent growth behind, so eager to lay hold on air, they littered the ways like autumn already come. Every day the wind, sunning its wings in thicket and meadow, disclosed new eyes and set new doors a-swing to the bright world. Earth lay in the rapids of time; spring's green flood rushing over its sides forced it to the caress of life. Doris Foley was resolute to see the beauty of each day as it flew by; to her the spring-quickening of that year spoke as she remembered no other to have done; each morning to enquiry she was able to say, "I feel well," and to herself declared constantly "I am happy!"

There could be no doubt she seemed so. Tristram had visions of her afterwards with her lap full of the flowers gathered on their different rambles: daffodils, violets, primroses, she helped them to bear home. On a later day white wood anemones were their spoil, quick-fading things, which drooped and grew old in the hand that carried them, refusing an indoor life.

The children named each small dell after the things that grew there. They chanced on the anemone wood for the first time, when its flowers were in full snow, and the walk which brought them new wood and new flower together was remembered long after as a special stroke of good fortune. For Tristram that wood held magic, it seemed like a promised land flowing with milk and honey; he fell down on all fours to wallow in its beauty, and ran carrying white armfuls, unwilling to let any of them go, till he saw his Aunt Doris sitting in a snow-drift of the offerings Marcia had heaped on her.

Nor did that day's ramble finish without some further adventure. Up the steep bank of wood Tristram heard a wild note of distress, and bounding to find the cause, saw a stoat, disturbed by the noise of his approach, slip from a young rabbit's back and dart back into the undergrowth. The little wounded thing ran quite fearlessly to the boy's feet; stopping then, half-stunned, it let itself be taken up and fondled, and without begging it, seemed to suffer gladly the shelter his presence extended.

Tristram feared to let it go again where destruction awaited it; mothering instinct prompted him to carry it away home, heal its wound, and bring it restored again to its own place. Just behind the ears, where the stoat had fastened, blood was flowing; the child imagined that human, if not medical treatment was necessary; he ran back to his aunt with its small anatomy hugged fast, and between them they made a most benevolent to-do over

the little beast, fancying they could read grateful recognition through the round opening of its eyes. Tristram made a pannier for it, lined his coat under with grass and flowers, and brought it home, putting it into an improvised hutch for the night.

It was quite alive the next day, eating what was set before it with a sober cheerful demeanour. If the hutch was rough, the lying was soft and the food plentiful; nor had it a dull moment while Tristram was free to come and give it company. Withered wood-anemones thrust through the bars were to remind it of home.

On the second morning, Tristram broke in upon Marcia wild-eyed. "Where's Mike?" he demanded.

Mike was Marcia's very special, and was, at that moment, reposing on his young mistress's lap. "He has eaten my rabbit!" squealed Tristram, on catching sight of the culprit. "Oh, the black devil! Just you give him to me!" He struck a demanding attitude.

Marcia stood up for defence. "How do you know?" she demanded, in doubt as to the evidence.

"Who else would?" retorted Tristram. "Bring him down to the hutch, and see if he doesn't show it! Oh, Marcia! my poor little rabbit is all gone!"

"He got out," was suggested.

"Oh no, he wouldn't! He was much too tame!" Tristram wept with rage for the loss of his dear two-day-old.

Marcia refused to be convinced. Being a wild rabbit, of course he went, was her theory. Could Tristram show a better?

The boy made a sudden dart on Mike, crying: "Look, there's grey fur on his paws, and his whiskers are bloody! You *shall* let me have him!"

"He shan't be hurt!" stuck out Marcia.

Tristram smote in with all his might. The cat fuffed,

and dug claws. Resenting on Tristram the pains her flesh had to endure, Marcia held up Mike's body, now ramping in heraldic attitude, and darted him, all fours out, on Tristram. The cat dealt him rather more of a scratch than its mistress intended; she made haste to get the table between them for a barrier.

Tristram dropped the fight, threw up a bleeding chin, and marched out, crying: "Yes, that's the way girls fight, like cats; all spittings and scratchings." He called back from the passage: "If I catch Mike, I kill him! Mind that!"

"You won't catch him!" said Marcia; and to make sure, carried him off there and then to the gardener's lodge, and begged for him to be locked away in a safe place till called for.

Coming back to the house under cover of the shrubbery she beheld flagrant trespass taking place — Tristram up aloft, where he had least right to be, in her own climbing-tree, wagging its high branches defiantly, and singing shrill scorn of her at the top of his voice. It was apparent that he hoped to have her within hearing; but his eye prowled, and had not lighted yet upon her whereabouts.

She knew the words of his summons well enough: it was their established battle-cry, an insult she had never yet let pass. She heard "Cowardy custard" sent forth to rhyme with "mustard"; "slugs, snails, and puppy-dogs' tails" were the ingredients which went to her making. It was choice language; children have the gift for finding it. Marcia was all but in honour bound to take up the cudgels when that song was borne in on her. Now, however, she stopped, sought deeper shelter in the shrubs, and, avoiding every bit of open, skulked in by a back way. In truth, her sense of justice smote her, for on further examination there had been no doubt that Mike's black paws had grey fur on them.

Her mean evasion left Tristram to the weary bother of remaining enskied for the whole hour preceding lesson-time, and of singing his throat dry, like a scarer of birds, with the challenge that remained unanswered. At the end of that time he began to guess what dogged underhand tactics she opposed to him, for he knew well that bright sunshine and the leisure-hour would have brought her out of doors, had not crafty knowledge kept her away. He pulled out his pocket knife, carved his initials large on her pet climbing-branch, and came down.

During lessons they stiffened their necks at each other like two towers in Coventry. Tristram's eye was waiting to shoot disdainful fires whenever she looked up. He curled a superior lip at every mistake she made, but, for reasons, knew his own lessons badly enough.

By dint of headstrong blundering he got himself kept in, and, having secured the penalty, tossed his nose in triumph, as to say: "Anything rather than be in your company, Sister Marcia!"

Her own tasks ended, Marcia went away soberly without looking at him. Presently she came back into the school-room, and sat down to a lesson-book. Tristram grew puzzled, for he remembered how his war-whoops had kept her at an earlier hour from her usual run in the open air. Outside the sun shone still; Marcia, as he looked at her now, wore a demure air of penance. Her meaning remained dark to him.

In the silence that followed Tristram's perfunctory scratchings upon his slate, these two queer natures acted and re-acted on each other's consciences. Compunction dripped steadily in the mild corners of their hearts. Presently Marcia must raise gloomy eyes to see Tristram's burning hot upon hers. She endured his gaze, softening her glance the while, but making no other sign.

It was not till the slow tedium of luncheon was over that she took his hand, and led him out silently to the scene of last night's tragedy.

She jerked her head, and showed him her pride brought low in the person of her beloved special — Mike, in such disgrace as had never before fallen upon his sacred sleek body. He sat a hunch of misery in the desolated rabbit-hutch, among scatterings of bran and withered lettuce-stalks, mewing miserably to be let out. Round his neck was a bow of black which drooped long weeper ends. Never did quadruped show a more pilloried sense of shame.

Tristram, who knew how unbending was Marcia's pride in her own belongings, became awed by such a sight. Remorse rained into his soul also; he too, now, had a guilt which he must own to.

"Oh, Marcia!" he mumbled, "I didn't know you'd done that; so I ——" So far he got, and paused.

Her eye required that he should make an end of what he had to say.

"So I carved my name up in your tree, that's what I did!" said Tristram.

She gave him a long stare, saying nothing while you might have counted ten.

"All right, Trampy," she said, at last, "you may have it." Her tree for his rabbit was, after all, no robbery. She kissed him, feeling that the magnanimity lay more on her side now, then went slowly and unfastened the door of the rabbit-hutch. Mike leapt out with an afflicted air, and went stumbling over the trailing ends of his scarf. "He may wear that till he can get it off," observed Marcia.

For her and Tristram the incident was over; they were as good as gold to each other the same day. If the Tramp wept for his rabbit, it was not when Marcia was

by. As for Mike, it was days before his mistress caressed him again in Tristram's presence; but furtively, when they were in private together, she made him divine amends. He did not have to wear his weeds many days.

CHAPTER VIII

MYTH, RITUAL, AND RELIGION

THE Sage had spoken confidently of Tristram to his aunt as "our boy," meaning to say, "You and I have this right to him above others, seeing that we know him best." In truth they had a common sympathetic understanding of the sweet, sociable animal he was, of quick heart and intellect, built upon highly-strung nerves; yet it may be doubted if they had a notion of the depths of him. Solitude, as we have seen, turned him into another creature, difficult to track. Into that part of his being Marcia made the deepest guess, waylaid it where she could, yet knew that something escaped her. There were times when she would see Tristram by himself, full of small gesticulations, asseverations and denials of the head, forefinger or fist at play, foot stamping out argument — all the live springs in him at work. But if she joined herself to him then, blank looks put up a barrier of secrecy: nothing would he tell. In all their games of make-believe, it was from her that the invention had first to come. Tristram would submit himself to her inspiration when any definite game was up, and would foot it well to the other's tune; but there were times when to Marcia's imperious "I want you!" his answer in effect would be "I want myself!" nor could companionship then be got out of him. He was off like quick-silver from a jerked palm, to gather for himself there is no tell-

ing what handfuls of mystery. In that world of his own he dwelt hidden: Marcia knew of it, but little enough of what went on there.

Streamside dwellers will tell how they have lived on a spot for years, and watched the current water and the fishers up and down its banks, but have never once seen the solitary otter that has his range there. Yet he is no sentimentalist, this diver shy of men's eyes: he seems to know well that hands are dead against him, that his is a dying race, of a savagery which Nature, no longer wild, seeks to shake off: knows it with a tragic intensity that does not belong to the water vole or the other small vermin, for whom there is still space and to spare. Dog of Pan! when the hounds get upon his trail, something of the heroic age runs in him, and dies fighting great odds. Look for it among humans, this survival of a breed fierce and aboriginal, now become hermetic from men's eyes; traces of it you shall find, yet they shall not bring you to its lair. There, hidden yet in our midst, an old atavism of the race dies hard, rebellious against Time, savage, yet wondrously shy — so shy that it may be at your side, or under your own roof, and you not know that it is there. The survivors of the tribe make few signs, caring, perhaps, but little to be recognised by their fellows: solitaries they stale it out, till it grows faint in the blood. Civilised custom so soon makes us unfaithful to the natural man that is within us. The domestic dog is more staunch, and will wind himself round three times before he settles, though he lies in a kennel and wears collar and chain.

What follows of Tristram, grotesque though it be, gives you him at no game of shadowy make-believe. Growing experience and every-day fact have done little to put sobriety into his brain, or bring his thoughts into open play. Just below the surface, not to be tracked, his

mind runs like a mole: the earth of ancestry clings to it. You find here the fears of the savage, preserved and cropping up with strange force; all his furtiveness and sly dealings with the odds and chances of life ready again to become strong. With Tristram there was little need to pick and choose a day to have sight of the two natures in him — the social and the solitary.

New places excited him: to light on a fresh field-way, still more to enter a new bit of wood, started the kindling process, and the less then did he care for the fellowship of his own kind. If in that mood he were to come upon a stream, then it must be crossed, no matter how; to be at the other side of everything, and to beat pursuit in getting there, became a sort of a necessity to him. A mile from home the sense of adventure began.

One wild morning of March and wind, homeless between earth and cloud, brother and sister had run up into the wilderness above the house, to give a short stretch to their limbs. Tristram had vowed to Marcia that before clock-stroke he would be quit of her company, and the tussle of pursuit and escape grew hot. The hour grew close: they ran and tumbled to an accompaniment of squeals, Marcia determined, Tristram beginning to be scared. She had him by the coat; he left it in her hands; she was driving him down towards a high fence; it challenged his eye desperately. Could he leap it? enquired fear.

Suddenly the whole thing became dead earnest, a matter of life and death to him. Her laugh was behind him. "You can't do it, Trampy!" and he, with a wild catch of the heart, went up into air, broke across the obstacle, and leapt away to possess himself of solitude. The imperious mood had come like a seizing hand through his hair, and lifted him clean back to savagery. Marcia might then cry after him in vain; he had other companions.

When her feet ceased running, these ceased not to follow on: and "Mother, mother, mother!" cried his blood, as he dashed wildly through bowing woodlands that roared, enchantment to right and left of him; and, where his feet fell, heard snap and crumble the dry bones of the monstrous age; and felt on face and hands the exhalations of its dead breath. Sensation spun in him of a speed that overtook the wind: wild horses after him he would not have feared; yet a terror came that the wood was endless, that he was never again to look out upon clear sky.

The mood passed; spent lungs and legs acquiesced, when he came to open ground, that danger no longer followed close. Over his head, up a slight rise of field, a poplar bowed hugely before the blast. In the shelter of its scooped rind he threw himself down, and through the throbbing of his own blood heard within the sound of its strained fibres, and the deep waters of its sap sobbing up and down without rest. How much life went on there that he had not suspected! Merely to place his ear and listen had been the key. Now he was to know about trees (recurring to it whenever after great winds blew), how within the mænad motion and gesticulation of their limbs, this sound went on of disastrous struggle, this wrestling-out of a wish to live, with the element which was finally to bring them death. Only once had he heard a sound at all like it, a little sound against which he had cried out in the darkness for help to come. Domesticity crept back into his heart; after all, the thing he loved best in the whole world was his Aunt Doris. He snatched a handful of daffodils, and to look at her once more set out on a race for home. He was late for lessons when he got there, and was very little concerned to find Marcia in sulks.

At a much later day, on the bare hill above the Beacon

Farm, he was to know a tree peculiar and dear, that he would visit when the winds were up, for the sake of the strange voice with which it spoke to him. A gaunt twisted fir, weather-bitten by all the gales of the locality, it seemed to fulfil the adage and to have had its features wried many times and fixed, this way and that, by changes of the wind, and so was already a nipped and gnarled specimen of battered age when the boy first came on it. He took it in his arms often, and discovered in himself, one day, a quaint scruple and solicitude in regard to its honour, when having swarmed to a high bough, he found there five wind-hover's eggs in a crow's nest, and would take none of them, because his tree was their guardian.

But the boy's cranks needed little of romance to work upon; drop upon him wherever you liked, you would have found him cheating life of its prose. An unadorned view of facts was the thing most difficult for his mind to attain. What he made of even a plain pike-staff (rod, pole, or perch, call it!) you will see before this chapter is ended.

It happened one day that, for lack of any one else, Tristram had to be sent into Bembridge, and for the first time was going alone. His person was due at Mrs. Harbour's to be measured for new clothes, and for a test whether his brain could be as well trusted over the distance as his legs, sundry small errands were given to him. His Aunt Doris armed him with a slip of instructions for a guide, but he had a method of his own which he thought better. One commission he hung here and another there, looping them by imaginary strings to the flaps and buttons of his apparel. Thus visualised, they came more adhesive to his memory than had he learned the list of them by rote. Marcia commissioned him for sweets, and the terms being cash, her twopence went into

his pocket — alas, not to be found again when felt for: his mind proved itself the better carrier.

It was early morning, and a day's holiday ahead made the boy in haste to be off and back again. His ritual of preparation for going out had become an instinct; but the telling of it takes time. Going to the boot-hole for his shoes and gaiters, he had to keep one foot carefully planted in the passage above, lest the evil genius of the place should have a hold on him. Down there dwelt the quick-into-the-pit ghosts of rebellious Israelites whom, from his Scripture-readings, he had thus familiarly localised, choosing for them the blackest and most pit-like place in the whole house, a mouth ever ready and waiting for more fodder to be added to it. From that shadowy maw of death boots came, with a suspect character; before putting one on, he would shake it violently, charging unclean spirits to come out of it, and squeeze its toe to warn trespassers forth, as punctiliously as ever lonely dame looked under bed in the dread hope of finding flat burglary below.

From the swing-door to the foot of the staircase was a matter of ten paces, a distance to be crossed smartly at a bound; for woe betide him if he had not a first foot planted before the door should slam to behind him. On the way upstairs other delicacies of ritual had to be gone through; the half-landing was a place of peril; to escape its local demons he had, time and again, hauled himself past by way of the banisters. Once he fell; yet, for all that, seemed to his own mind to have steered clear by a marvel of the evil chance which had been threatening him.

"I was sliding down the banisters!" was the fib he let fly when raging authority hastened to pick up a grievously battered object; for the fall was merely a healthy incident by the way. Indeed, all strokes actually dealt him

by fate Tristram took as in the day's work. The evil against which he so constantly fought, never in fact fell on him; nor had he even a notion what the thing itself would be like, save that in all probability it had four ravenous legs to run on, — an apprehension which harks him fairly back, one may think, to the fears which first drove imperilled man to the sharpening of his primitive wits.

With Tristram, however, the fear had become half-spiritualised; the point is that some aspect of wild nature dwelt behind his brain, and made a gnawing at his bones. Physical knocks he ever accepted with stolid good humour, as he had accepted at Marcia's hands his first helping of mud-pie, on the day when they had sat down resolutely to get through and have done with that portion in life, the "peck of dirt," which they had heard was decreed to be every man's. In that case, however, Nature had raised her hand against the first mouthful, and taught them to be more patient in fulfilment of their destiny. We give Tristram no more than his due; patience over what he received went ever side by side with an equal impatience over what he was about to receive; wherein he was but like the early Christian martyrs, perhaps like all the enthusiasts and cranks who have helped from first to last to salt and preserve the world into what it is.

In receptiveness the reader must follow his example, or throw down the book, for he perceives by this time, no doubt, that Tristram's history is not to be told without many parentheses, back-slidings and forward-slidings by the way. 'Tis not without a very business of explanation to and fro, that we can even get him started out of the house on an ordinary week-day errand; such an eel is he to catch and set into straightforward motion.

By dint of right-footing he gets himself at last fairly out and on to the public way. The gate-demon, fellow to

the one which battened on the slam of the swing-door, he made impotent for a while, by propping its jaws back with a stone, and getting in many steps to the good on his run towards town, before the next passer-by should let it once more click itself to the latch. The poor gate-keeper was indeed now of very small account, having no strong springs to act on like his fellow within doors; Tristram by his devices had trodden him into very fine dust, but belief in his actuality did not diminish.

Half a mile below the house, by the mill lying down in the hollow, Tristram lingered to watch the big wheel trampled round by the steady tread of incoming water. He sent a prying eye into the depths to see at what point the trough-like cogs heaved off their load. Presently he was stretched prone almost at touch with this great elephantine marker of time. Mrs. Harbour's old dread for her nursling would have been revived, could she have looked at him then, and heard all the confidences that passed, while into his face the wheel flew spray, and the roof dripped moisture over his head from pendants of moss and fern.

There as he hung absorbed, the miller took note of him, and coming behind, asked what fish he was hoping to catch. Tristram said he was looking to see where the corn went in. The man laughed, friendly to such ignorance, and bid the boy come in and see how corn really got itself ground. The Tramp's conscience pricked him to his errands, and with a promise to take a look in upon his way back, he was up and off.

Half a mile further was the beginning of the debatable land, where a sense of distance from home began to act on his blood and rouse adventurous expectations. On this day it chanced that they were satisfied. In the straight run of fields which bordered on the town the child sighted from afar a figure he had once before met

when in the safe company of his elders; a tall thin man with a high hat low down over his ears, tight lips, a large roving eye, distended nostrils, that breathed vehemently, and a body thrown to its work like a pendulum on the swing — altogether a queer, uncanny figure to be seen at any time on a country way.

Tristram and Marcia had described him to themselves, after that first meeting, as "the man with the yellow breath," and had looked forward, in trepidation, to a second encounter.

Now Tristram, all alone, conceived a great horror of passing him; over the half-breadth of one field he faced his approach, but at the last fairly turned and ran. Quitting the path, he sprang through a hedge, and creeping down the further side of it, saw his man come to a standstill, and look vaguely to right and left, as if to make out what wind had raked the nearing pedestrian so suddenly off his path. Presently he nodded to himself under his great hat, as if the meaning of the thing had come to him, and swung forward again upon his solitary road.

Tristram breathed free. On his return journey he enquired of the miller, and was told of the man and his condition. He lived, the boy heard, beyond Hiddendon, tenant of a small farm and officer of excise in that remote, rural district, a lonely man, without wife or family. The oddity of his appearance had won him the nick-name of Daddy Wag-top. The miller asked if Tristram had been afraid of him; some children, he remarked, were "skeert" at him. Tristram denied the impeachment. "I thought him just a funny man," said he, choosing to forget how unsteady had been his legs when he returned to the field-track after the gaunt figure of Daddy Wag-top had disappeared.

Free of that apparition he discovered on reaching the town that somewhere upon the road the virtue of two-

pence had gone out of him. Straightway it was in his mind to tell Marcia how on his lonely way he had been pursued by "the man with the yellow breath," caught by the heels, suspended head downwards in air, and shaken empty of his wealth: and he had not a doubt that, although Marcia might not believe him, she would regard the explanation as a satisfactory money's worth, without suspecting him of so base a thing as a lie might ordinarily be suspected to cover. Truth that touched not the vital sensation of things, that sounded paltry and mere in the telling, had not a value for Tristram, nor was owed to a comrade of Marcia's staunchness of intellect. Had he fallen into a pond by walking forward with his eyes shut, he would sooner have claimed that it was by walking backwards with his eyes open. For the falls of man continue, in the following of Adam, to make him feel naked and ashamed; concealment is his instinct; and true to his nature he invents his own excuses.

The creature of mystery drew near at last to Mrs. Harbour's door. It lay in a small enclosed court where cockle-shells and bright flowers abounded; between railed squares of garden-plot, cobbled paths led up to the threshold of each small tenement. Halting at one of these, the boy tapped; heard, after a pause, movement within; and became a changed creature. Away crumbled the mould of ancestry; his mole mind no longer grubbed in dim passages for under-world meanings; 'twas with a twittering impatience of the affections that he waited for admission to a heart that held welcome for him.

A second knock, imperatively delivered, caused the door to open and reveal Mrs. Harbour rearing herself like a barricade, with refusal in her countenance. When she recognised her visitor, her eye softened to him; but there was woe in it. It was apparent she had a grievance.

"What, Master Trampy dear, is it you?" she began in

fond utterance. "Come in, my love, my lamb! What's brought you so early? A body mayn't get up late, it seems, without all the world catching her at it. It's been knock, knock, knock, all the morning; and I vowed that the next might go *on* knocking till they thought me to be out. But I didn't: my heart telling me I should be doing it to the wrong person. Sit ye down there, my dear; and I wish ye'd not have come before I got rid of the taste of my breakfast."

Tristram, seeing a meal in remains, begged that she would finish it, while he sat and looked on.

"No," wailed the aggrieved woman. "It's not my breakfast, Master Trampy; it's my prayers! I can't get 'em said through. Hardly had I set down to 'em after breakfast, when, for my forgetting to take it off, the kettle boils over. That made me to begin again the first time: for it never do, I say, to give the Almighty His due piece-meal, like a coat that's not been stitched togathers. Then I'd hardly got down on my knees again, when the butcher come by for his weekly order. And then, as the angels would have it, you come a-knocking your little body against the door: which is where we are now! Just you set yourself down easy in that chair, and let me get through with 'em, for work's not in me till me prayers are done."

The Tramp sat down with a solemn face; though Mrs. Harbour had many times heard him say his prayers, hers he had never heard. It was a thing he had not seen his elders do out of church, having no idea, indeed, that they were bound to that same convention; and painfully abashed he was on beholding his old Nan-nan at any such exercise. But seeing her honestly distressed over the lets and hindrances she spoke of, he gave her a friendly smile, and then looked grave, while Mrs. Harbour went slowly down on her two knees, and started once more like

Sisyphus, to accomplish the labour which three times that day had been brought to nought.

She prayed aloud from a habit which belonged to her loneliness; also because she prayed by book, and silent reading was beyond her powers of scholarship. It touched Tristram's instinct of respect, to see that his presence was forgotten as soon as the first words of piety were uttered. But hardly had she fetched way into her general statement of transgression than he noted, with a sinking of the heart, how deliberately pondered were the words of her complaint; how slow came the punctuating Amens, as though from a reluctance to let a good thing go; and when at last she turned from familiar prayers to the unfamiliar of her own privacy, his dismay deepened, so stodgy grew the vocabulary of her devotions!

One good turn she did him — she prayed straight out and honestly for "Mr. Harbage, the green-grocer in Brook Street, whom the doctors can do no good to:" bringing to his mind's eye a pleasant note of local colour, a small shop-front containing fruit, and boxes frilled in tinsel and lined with pink tissue-paper — and making him aware that prayer might have some real connection with the actual concerns of life, a thought that had not occurred to him before. Also did she touch his heart once by the mention of his own name and that of his mother with the rest of the family in order. Her "Make him be a good boy," took a sense quite different from his own twice-a-day utterance of the same petition, and won for her the sincere addition of her name to the list of those he prayed for, till later developments released him from a habit which the literal not the spiritual law had imposed.

But these helps by the way did not deprive the ordeal of all its irritants. As ill fate would have it, the season was penitential and lenten, or the day was a Friday, and

according to the domestic rubric, an abridged litany had to be ground through. Tristram, listening while prayer after prayer made plodding for old Mrs. Nannie's speech, felt at last that violence must break out of him. The crock spaniel on the chimney-piece overhead, as it stared out of window with great owl-like eyes, wore an expression of hooting derision; the tall eight-day clock, tapping like a wood-pecker, as it picked with mincing distinctness small bits off the minutes, seemed deserving of assault and battery. He was dreading what other pieties might have to follow, when there came a sound of steps over the cobbles outside, and the sprightly attack of an umbrella handle on the door. The summons was repeated; Tristram writhed as the droning voice of Mrs. Harbour faltered and slowed preparatory to surrender. Was this, then, to be all gone over once more in his hearing, from the beginning to the place where they stood now, and so on with more to the end? Perish rather the favour wherein Mrs. Nannie now held him, and the fit of the garments she was shaping for him! He screwed up his courage to the inspiration that seized him, crossed on tip-toe to the door, and opening it but a couple of inches, wedged in a face resolute to oppose intrusion.

"Please," he said, "would you mind going away? Mrs. Harbour's here, but she can't come to you! She can't see anybody, not just now." Then he shut the door quickly, and heard, with relief, the sound of departing feet; and the steadily continued rhythm of the abridged litany was almost as music to his ears.

He sat back meekly in his chair, and endured gladly what little had to follow, having averted the larger catastrophe. A rebuke for his presumption he could scarcely hope to escape; but had a thought to mitigate its severity.

So when Mrs. Harbour closed the well-thumbed book and shuffled to her feet, Tristram led.

"Nannie," said he, "while you were saying your prayers, some one came and knocked at the door; so I asked them to go away and not disturb you. I might, mightn't I? And they went."

The charming assumption that her rapt mind had been oblivious to things earthly secured its object. Mrs. Harbour winked within her honest old heart at the cheating flattery of his tongue, and loved the lad for a soft-voiced rogue. The squirrel-motions of his small body, as her fat hands played on it with the measuring-tape, wrought pleasure in her enough to last that day, and many days after. She babbled to him wondrously of warm "flannens" (her own word for linings), and of bright buttons to be put on the legs and sleeves of the "filleteens" she was to make for him: heard from him while discussing pockets, complaint about the lost twopence, and conjured it back to him out of her own small store, greatly to the child's mystification and delight. And did he love her still, and remember she was his old Nan-nan? she enquired, then, for a reward. Indeed she believed so, when his arms went round her, when the stress of present emotion was persuading him that his dear Nannie, was dearest but one to him in the whole world.

So they parted; and it was only natural, perhaps, for a light weight in years such as he, to carry much more of her heart away with him than he left behind of his. Is he for that to be set down as fickle?

At least he had memory enough to go and spend Marcia's recovered twopence at the small green-grocer's in Brook Street; and greatly did he surprise the shop-woman by enquiring if Mr. Harbage were better, or had found doctors to suit him yet; a courtesy, in small coin and speech, which all came from Mrs. Harbour's late getting up that morning, and was in its small degree an answer, one may suppose, to the good woman's prayer.

And here, in a chapter already out at elbows in its motley of incidents, may be set down a final sample of that strain of credulous fancy never quite separate from the running of Tristram's blood. It is the plain pike-staff story already promised to the reader, and must stand, unconnected even as it stood in Tristram's life, a mere freak out of the fermentation of his brain.

Deep in the wilderness above the Valley House, in the midst of a dense overgrowth of privet and laurel, Tristram came one day upon an old post set upright in the ground. Remnants of red paint showed bleached and blistered on its surface; about the base there were signs of fire; no path led up to it. Round it the laurels had left a space as fearing to close in on it. So standing in leafy secrecy, for no purpose that could be seen, the thing seemed merely to be there in the assertion of its own existence. Once found, it drew Tristram day after day to ponder the mystery of its presence: it took on an aspect of age pre-historic, of lurking forces, of malignant capacities.

Slowly its meaning grew: why it had stood there so long, and remained there so secretly, bidding, beckoning, and warning with uplifted finger, requiring a certain worshipper, who had never come, to render the necessary homage. Tristram could name him.

He began to divine certain things this god had required of him, and to dread penalties ready to fall on him for all the years wherein he had ignorantly let observance go by. It was borne in on him that for every day of his life one full circuit round this perch of divinity was owing; and that for his long neglect of service so deeply in arrears speediest atonement was necessary. How many days had he lived ignorant of this godhead? He questioned his Aunt Doris, and heard that the number of them was more than one thousand, more than two, not

more than three. Between two and three thousand, then. He started to work off the reckoning.

Will you behold a fellow-creature, with a full sense of humour in him, walking round and round a post solemnly by the hour, and day after day, for the purpose of averting an unknown evil chance? And believe him probable or not, there he is; you have to stomach him. A sincere devotee he is too, yet if he finds you looking at him, will shrivel and shrink at the discovery, and under the oppression of your judgment, swear that he knows the whole thing to be folly.

By dint of hard labour, Tristram had achieved a clear conscience toward his new deity, when one day quite suddenly the malicious power sprung a surprise on him. All those laps of worship had been wound on the wrong way; going from right to left, he should have gone from left to right! Conviction took hold of him grimly; his labour had been worse than useless, a very negation of worship: what he had thought to be praise had really been insult.

There was only one thing to do. Penitently he unwound the work of his crude noviciate, and penitently wound it on again the right way, trusting that his deity would yet be patient with him till he had found out the true and orthodox ritual of post-reverence.

His heart grew in jealous affection for his tormentor. When he had honourably paid his debt he rendered gratuitous service; he larded with flowers the uprightness he bowed down to; he offered to his idol with a free conscience windfalls that for his own eating he would not have taken, and poured out in libation the collected dregs of wine-bottles. Something of prudence no doubt was in this piety: by advance offerings of circuitous worship he laid up store in Heaven, foreseeing that some day he might be absent or ill, and in time to come might go away

for good, never to return; yet the Post would still be demanding its daily circuit so long as his life continued. Therefore did he now push forward his stewardship of the mysteries that in the years ahead he might stand blameless, with a consciousness of duties fully performed.

One day he saw that upon the top of his post were bird-droppings, a natural defilement which displeased his sense of the reverence owed there. To prevent the desecration he secured a straw bottle-sheath, and fitted it to the post; and behold! an old symbol of sun-worship, blindly, fortuitously attained. And round this for many days and months Tristram gyrated in the performance of heliotropic mysteries, satisfying to his heart; till on a day of festival, as he grovelled ceremoniously, he chanced to look up, and beheld with dismay the solemn great eyes of Marcia staring at him.

CHAPTER IX

THE ROD THAT BUDDED

ALL through the summer and autumn of that year the Doris-days extended, shaping a golden memory for all concerned. Their only drawback was that they passed so quickly, bearing with them in their retreat irrevocable delights. The lady herself was too conscious of their fleeting character not to feel it so. When crocus and fruit-blossom, laburnum and peony died against the warming heart of the season's life, she watched them go with a wonder whether she had ever before found them so fair, and with a quickened sense of the autumnal mood which the year holds for ever in its blood.

She had taught the children her own love of gardening, and to keep them in good countenance became the proprietor of ground close to theirs, which no hands but her own might plant or water. The gardener himself was supposed to share with the children their envy of the beauty of "Auntie Dorrie's garden." Flowers from it stood on birthday breakfast-tables, and in their fragrant depths held offerings which were doubly delightful, sprung from such floral foldings.

Tristram helped himself to a large measure of earth, and gave up most of it to romantic experiments, of which nothing remained in the years after but a fig tree and a plantation of foxglove that throve rankly when neglect

became their portion. His weakness was to bring in wild things from his walks, and give them a rich soil to live in. The others named it his weed-garden. "At least it keeps him dirty!" said Doris, as though that in itself were a craving of his nature, good to be satisfied.

Marcia let her ground go to the flowers that pleased her mother's fancy: to mignonette, over which she claimed a monopoly, to periwinkle, and bright, velvet-eyed sweet-williams, and white pinks, and the rock-loving valerian: all these were serviceable to her purpose: she was jealous against imitation. In their several ways the three gardens flourished; but even Marcia had to admit that Auntie Dorrie's stood unrivalled, though liking her own better.

During a fortnight of dry summer weather Doris, having to be away, left her garden in Tristram's hands. He performed the task faithfully and with humility, entering upon no freakish experiment of his own; and upon her return presented her to nurslings, whose bloom of life satisfied even her exacting requirements.

She said to the boy lightly, handling his hair with small pulls to get at his attention, "Will you look after it, then, always, whenever I am away? Always?"

He was for promising straight off.

"Oh, I don't want promises," she said; "you might break them. But I would like you to; so remember it!" She gave his hair a parting tug, and raced him to get first at the big watering-can. "I've beaten Auntie Dorrie!" he cried out in triumph to Marcia. It was an event to have done that.

Those days that rippled with the flowing charm of her companionship wrote themselves happy ones on the tablets of two memories, and made quiet history better than eventful to look back upon.

One afternoon, in the warm glows of middle autumn, the Sage came on them by surprise. He had taken a

good part of the day to arrive, driving a quaint shandry-dan of his own through the country lanes, and was the more pleased with himself in consequence. He declared that he felt fit and morally braced through having avoided fifteen miles of railway — a living creature instead of a thing ignominiously shoved and shunted from place to place, mere parcel with ticket attached — label he chose to call it — needing to be classed also, first, second, or third — an indignity to himself or his fellow-passengers — lowering, he declared, to any man's conscience. In a word, having ridden his hobby for over four hours, he was slow to get off it again. At the end of all his sweet crabby nonsense, he was forced to own apologetically that as he had so come, they must put up with him for the night.

Doris dropped him a low curtsey and leaned her face for a salute, understanding the gentle amorousness of his regard. Her ways of welcome made it so easy for him to forget that he was a celebrity at all. She loved the garrulous quaint foolishness to which he gave way when in privacy, and was ever at intrigue to get more of it.

"And where is the Tramp?" was his question, when greetings to the two sisters were over. "Not run away again, I hope?"

Doris thought it likely, since he was not in sight, nor to be heard of; and declared that she believed him to be always on the verge of it. "I have but to speak of you," she said, "to see the wandering fever take hold of him."

"And I," replied the Sage, "never go out, but I leave word with my housekeeper to hold him till my return; so confidently am I expecting him some day or another! But the anniversary is past; I look now for some change of the wind to bring him. I prophesy to you, Madam, of times when you will not be able to hold him at a stand-still. Tether him, and like a kite he'll strain; loose him,

and he comes to earth. Let him feel free, and he will twizzle on one leg and keep happy."

Mrs. Gavney did not see why Tristram should not be settled and happy with all the liberty he had. The mere talk of him running away distressed her. She believed him more docile and obedient than the others would allow, and cited his gentle ways with her as proof how easily he could be made domestic and governable.

"I have only to speak quietly to him," she said with a hint of superior wisdom. And the fact was true if the inference was not.

"All the same," said Doris, "some fine day he will run! He will come back again, dear," she added. "You need never be anxious for him."

But Mrs. Gavney had a mother's belief in her own intuition, and would not let go her claim to know better. "You talk," was her complaint, "as if we had some wild animal in the family!"

"If I showed him to you in one of his dishevelments, you would think so!" said Doris.

"Then, surely, we should now be training him," said her sister.

"Not to be tame," thought Doris.

"Not to be a wild animal," maintained Mrs. Gavney.

Doris imagined she saw combinations which made the thing lovable.

"I pray that he may be neither wild nor animal!" cried the elder sister, casting timorous thoughts toward the propensities of youth.

"Now there," broke in the Sage, "is why the phrase frightens you! You damn the words separately, and doubly damn them in company, letting the adjective act on the noun like a red rag on a bull. Separate them fairly, and see if they may not become innocent. To be animal one needs not to be bestial; and to be wild means to be

unharnessed rather than savage. That boy of yours now — I take the wild in him first: call him wild, if you will, as wind-flowers, clover, and the breath March are wild; or as the wild bee who makes honey as sweetly and industriously as the one we hive and take toll from. He may be wild as a bird's notes are, which contain trills our trained voices cannot equal, or as water which runs pure on its native hillside. Have you any fear of such wild things as these that your boy must not be like them?"

"I would prefer to see even his best qualities disciplined," demurred Mrs. Gavney.

"By their own laws!" the Sage assented. "They will be: these they live by. Dew, and song, and sunlight, and cloud are all wild things untamable by man. Though you can sadden the lark's song by caging it, you cannot reshape it to your liking. Would you wish to? It is the wildness that springs eternal out of Nature's unspoiled beauty. It rose up before the Fall, and came unchanged to us out of Eden, and remains divine. There is another wildness, wanton and predatory, that comes of deformity; where creation groans you find it; in likeness to that, man becomes base. But apart from that, to be wild is not to be libertine; while to be tame can seldom mean to be free. What do you think, madam?"

Mrs. Gavney replied, with an unintended touch of irony, "I think, dear Professor, that you have been talking poetry."

Doris laughed. "And I know," said she, "what Anna's definition of poetry would be: something beautiful, which we know not to be true. For my part, I accept my Tramp's wildness on those terms with a whole heart; it is the foundation to start from. Now, for the animal in him; will you not expound that also?"

The Sage answered: "The poetry for that, Madam, is in the word itself; I have merely to be etymological. For

'animal' — what is it but the name of the soul in the most durable language on earth, linked into daily use by the softest letter of our alphabet. When the animal body dies, 'tis but a single letter of its nature that perishes; its accident vanishes, 'anima,' the substance, lives. Man bulks but by reason of the breath of life, breathed into his nostrils by God; as the wind-bag shrivels to a small thing when the air is out of it, so the corruptible body; 'tis a microscopic part of us, grass cut down; only when it stood up and was filled with the breath of Heaven, had it the stature and the fulness of a man. Animal to me says soul; and death, I believe, holds a far smaller kingdom in us than appears: the symbols of our quickening lie everywhere."

The Sage put forth the faith that was in him with some fervency, and while he did so noted how the two sisters with eyes that met in wavering and tender enquiry, were each at gaze into the other's thoughts. The significance of that silent correspondence of the two faces was not missed by him; intuitively he read a meaning. "Adieu, adieu, oh, adieu, dear Beloved; think me not gone when I am!" the looks of one seemed to say; and where regards of affection and grief so equal were exchanged, it was but natural that he should misread the giver for the receiver. So it was the elder lady his mind fixed on; and he thought compassionately, how natural was her dread, even of the small running away on Tristram's part with which they had playfully threatened her. Watching the frail, languid figure, he wondered if only a few months or a whole year remained to a life destined to last for twenty.

Doris spoke out of reverie: "Your mention of bees in reference to Tristram, reminds me; he has them in his bonnet to a certainty. I found him the other day at the hives, handling them as they went in and out. And an odd thing he had to say! — 'Don't touch me, Auntie

Dorrie, or they'll sting!' — himself, not me. He owned to having been stung, but very seldom; and when that happens, what do you think he does? He runs till he drops, and assures me that then all the pain has gone out of him."

"There," remarked the Sage, "do you behold the true animal: the 'anima,' the breath of its life relieving it of its humours. Pain and disease come mainly from dwelling on them. Death itself, without man's morbid dread of it, might be staved off till the day when it was desired. It is said that snake-bitten natives are beaten to divert their attention; if it is done sufficiently, they don't die. You must go on according to the receipt for the pig and the *Amblongas patties* — 'If he squeals, beat him again!' But, 'tis melancholy, if after a beating they *do* die! Dare one risk such a thing on one's conscience as to have beaten a man through his last moments?"

"Oh, my dear Professor," complained Doris, "why do you always give practical doctrine such a sad wind-up? Put sins for snake bites — now I shall never be able to beat the Tramp for any of his sins, lest, through my not beating him enough, he should die in them!"

"Never beat for the deadly sins, and you will be safe," answered the Sage. "Beat for the lesser ones, and a short beating won't matter."

"But do you ever have to beat him, my dear?" enquired Mrs. Gavney; whereat Doris and the Sage broke into merry laughter, which put an end to the matter of their present discussion.

Tristram was not then to be found; only Marcia, who for once was gracious to the old man, and took him to see their gardens. He praised hers for what he called its contented veracity; Doris's he named the garden of a soul; he flattered it by saying that Dante and Beatrice should meet there. Doris owned that she had found footmarks,

and had consolation now for the loss of a few roses. Viewing the Tramp's portion, the Sage said, "I think he wants the beating!" It showed a dry soil, the result of a week's neglect.

"It's my fault," said Marcia, and when asked how, threw out her hands with a forlorn show of indifference. "While I'm here he won't come!" she explained, and added, "we are having a quarrel, and it's not finished; and Trampy says he hates me!"

When hunger and the tea-hour called him, the Tramp turned up from a place which he defined as "Oh, nowhere." He was very abashed to find that he had missed two hours of the Sage's company. They had much to say to each other then, but talk did not flow with quite the uninterrupted gaiety of previous occasions. The Sage watched him thoughtfully.

The next day, after their visitor had departed, Tristram, the godless, chanced to roam by the gardens where Marcia was at work, and saw that his own had been tampered with.

"What have you been doing to my garden?" he demanded. It had been raked to a neat surface, and in one corner stood something to represent an olive-branch, lifting up its green head and arms to him.

"I've not touched it!" said Marcia, and walked away.

"No?" he muttered in retort, to gratify his own ears: "then you did it without touching; that's all!" And hardening himself, he pulled up the little emblem of peace, cast it across on to Marcia's border, and went off to nurse his demon afresh.

The two were at their lessons when Doris looked in on them to say, "Marcia, have you been touching any one's garden but your own?"

"I? no!" said Marcia, surprised, and looked across to Tristram.

"Oh, then it's all right," was Doris's quiet answer, and she went away, leaving the Tramp a very nice little problem to think out.

Thinking brought him near to the facts, and he passed the next two hours in a purgatory, which wrought havoc on his marks for good conduct and efficiency.

On the instant that lessons were over he darted off to forestall other eyes, and reinstate the despised olive-branch. That moral emblem was nowhere to be found. He divined a hand; and was for kissing it in abject penitence.

Coming to Doris with a face of sad confusion, he asked, "Auntie Dorrie, who put that tree into my garden?"

And she; "Who pulled it out again, Trampy?"

"I did," he confessed.

Said Doris, "The Professor put it in."

The boy looked at her hard. "And you?"

"Oh, yes, I helped. Your garden has been growing weedy. We thought we might put it straight for you. Marcia thought not. I see she was right."

"That's the worst of Marcia!" grumbled the boy. "She always is right."

"Then if she was right, the poor Professor and I have to make our apologies."

"No!" he contradicted, "she wasn't right; she was wrong! I mean she has got a nasty way of being right generally. And she does know it so, too!"

"Prove her wrong, then, this once. I think she will forgive you."

The boy's demon struggled with him for a while: then, "Where is it?" he said at last.

"Where is what?"

"That tree thing."

"You want it?"

"Yes, Auntie, you know I do! where is it, please?"

"Marcia knows already; I have told her," said Doris. "Do you want me to show it to you?" She made a small pretence of being occupied.

"No, I'll ask Marcia!" said the Tramp, and started to go; then returned and taking her hand, "come with me!" he pleaded.

Her willingness had its reward: she was witness to a pretty ceremony, of which she wrote word to the Sage. "A week's quarrel!" she commented, "all on his side, I believe, this time. Think of the evil courage and the obstinacy, to make such a thing possible in a creature of his years! And would to Heaven that all quarrels ended as quickly!"

"So," wrote the Sage in reply, "you have been beating him?"

"With your rod!" was her retort, "and it budded!"

CHAPTER X

THE AFFLICTION OF MORALS

WHEN autumn fell into its chills, the Valley House garden whispered all day with the fall of leaves. From the adjacent woodland more drifted in; and in every nook and angle of the walks piled a great waste and litter which to the children seemed wealth.

Doris had become so much a member of the household, that a word she let fall as she watched her young couple piling a storage of leaf-mould for their gardens, had little meaning to their ears.

"Tramp," she said, "do you know that in a week I shall be gone?"

The boy looked up and said, "Where?" and, "How long for?" nor troubled to take his hands off his work, thinking so little could be meant.

"In a kind of way, for good," she answered. "Not to Little Towberry; further away than that."

"Oh, but we don't want you to go!" objected Tristram.

"Don't want to go myself, silly one! It's a case of 'must'!"

"Why?" asked the boy.

"All this fall of the leaf doesn't suit me. I am going to hunt the summer, and suck honey by the sea."

Hunt the summer! The phrase brought back the long delight of the months that were just over. She had been

goddess to them through the green of the year; wherever she went, it seemed, summer would go with her.

"I wish I could go, too, then," pleaded Tristram. "I've never seen the sea. I want to!"

"Come and lend me your eyes, then!" she invited in sweet tones; and sat down on a bench, making a lap for him to climb into. "Now look, and tell me what colour?"

"Blue," said the child.

"I see grey," she returned; "grey, and a wheel with a squirrel running round inside. That's my Tramp. Where does a squirrel carry its memory, Tramp? In its eyes or its tail?"

His eyes, star-gazing into hers, answered for him.

"Put into yours, then, the colour these give you; take a long look and remember! Then when I'm away by the sea, think of these two poor eyes of mine, and you will have sea-colour to think of."

"Auntie, why are you crying?" asked the boy.

"Only salt water!" she assured him. "It comes of my eyes being sea-like!" She kissed him and shook him off, while he hungered not to be let go. Tristram remembered afterwards his long gaze into those blues which moistened as he looked at them; but her final farewell of a week later was a mere good-night, so lightly spoken, that it made no place for itself in his memory. He woke the morning after to find flowers on his pillow, a bunch of Japanese anemones, tied to a note in Doris's handwriting, that bid him look after her garden while she was gone. It is to be feared that after the first fortnight he rendered but a fitful obedience to her request, thinking more of the sea for which her eyes promised to remain an emblem. Before long, Marcia was to be found taking up his unfulfilled trust and keeping to reality things which under his handling tended so soon to become

a dream. By no word would she ever bring herself to admit the fondness of which her drudgery gave token; she regarded it as an unruly affection, for she could never entirely rid herself of a jealousy for preference in a heart where Tristram held first place: though with her, too, love of Tristram came first. To console herself, she was keen to claim a rival ownership. "Aunt Doris belongs to Trampy," she explained to her governess one day; "Mother belongs to me." For ideal content she must have all three as her belongings.

Following upon the Doris *régime* came that of Miss Julia Gavney, of which there is in the beginning less to be told. The children were now more with their governess, whose daily comings and goings were changed into residence when Doris was no longer at hand to take charge of their leisure.

Winter settled down and brought with it discontent to both, but especially to Tristram. Letters from Doris, full of the South and sunshine, came to cheer them at intervals through a penitential season. Without a companion who could go at the stretch they wished, and safely conduct their energies to exhaustion, there was no doubt the children ran into mischief; or, to be exact, one ran, and one, out of loyalty, followed.

Tristram measured out his miles by the rod that sought to rule him. "Let's invent something!" he would say, not meaning the invention to be altogether innocent: and would collect his thoughts, for some doing more scatterbrained than that for which he had last been punished. Miss Gavney reflected adversely on a supervision which could have allowed the boy to get so out of hand. There was discontent all round.

Tristram also found a subtle change taking place in Marcia: her loyalty to him grew strained when she saw him plunging into escapades merely that he might make

himself a spectacle distressing to the authority at home. Not all at once, but gradually, he discovered under all her staunchness that she harboured disapproval of his doings; at times she stuck her heels dead into the ground, refusing to join his vagrancies.

One day, hearing that ice bore on the smaller of the two ponds in the Hill Alwyn woods, he proposed forthwith to go skating. The promise had been given them of a free day so soon as the ice should prove safe enough. Here was the occasion; of the ice he had no doubts, of immediate permission he had: better, he thought, to go first and find out afterwards if full leave had been granted.

"But is it safe yet?" queried Marcia.

Tristram affirmed that it was: young John Tunny had been there at hockey with other lads heavier than himself, and the ice had borne them.

"Who let them in there, though?" she asked.

"Nobody. They were chevied off by the bailiff; but we'd go to the lodge and get leave."

Marcia said: "I don't think we were meant to go on to the Hill Alwyn ponds at all."

"But it's all the ice there is!" argued Tristram. "Old Grey at the mill breaks his up every morning with a punt, because he says mill-ice isn't safe."

Marcia was curt. "I shan't go!" she said.

"Then I shall!" retorted the boy at once.

"You'd better ask first."

"I shan't do that either: Aunt Julie's cross with me this morning, and would say no, out of spite."

"Ask mother, then!"

"She's frightened of ice until it's a foot thick, and would fancy we were going to be drowned all the time. Come on! Miss Binning can only keep us in some other day; and it may be all gone, by then."

The discussion ended with Marcia going in to lessons and Tristram off by himself. He was right about the ice; but got less enjoyment than he had hoped. Marcia had put an effective damper upon his morning's pleasure, merely by sitting at home and submitting herself to stale duty's call. The bailiff came and looked at him, and asked how he got in there. "I asked at the lodge," said Tristram.

"That's not enough," objected the sub-magnate; "you should have come to me." But, as he was there, he let him stay. "If any one comes down from the House, though, you must be off," said the bailiff. "This is private: only those who have keys are supposed to come."

The vicar of Little Alwyn had a key, Tristram knew; he wondered why his father had not also. The Valley House was bigger than the Vicarage, and they were nearer neighbours.

About noon Raymond Hannam, the vicar's son, turned up, and cried "Hullo!" on seeing him. He was a big lad three years Tristram's senior. Hitherto they had hardly met but in church, where they had exchanged nods and tokens of outside interests over the edges of their respective pews. The Tramp inclined toward friendship with one who held a free pass to those solitudes of wood and water. He drew up and watched the other putting on his skates. They swung away together; Tristram's blades kept time; he dropped behind that he might see and imitate the other's action. With a big heart he shouted "I'll race you!" and shot out, just to see.

"Where to?" was demanded.

"Anywhere!" he cried.

"Round the island and back?"

They raced: Tristram was easily beaten.

"I'll give you a start," said Raymond. Tristram was too proud to take all that was offered him. They raced

again; toward the end it was neck and neck for a while; Tristram was just beaten.

"How long have you been learning?" young Hannam enquired in a friendly way.

"Last year," answered Tristram.

"Not half bad!" commented the other. "You'll do!"

Finding himself approved the Tramp said, "My Aunt Doris taught me; she taught Marcia, too. She could beat you, she could!"

Raymond refrained from direct contradiction. "Can she do this?" he queried, and executed a flourish.

"There's nothing she can't do!" declared Tristram stoutly.

"Oh, that's all nonsense!" retorted the other; "a man can always do more than a woman can." This was news to Tristram; he contested the point doggedly, and was left unconvinced.

The boys glided into a quick liking for each other's society as their feet buzzed up and down those clear solitudes of frost, where thwarted reflections of hoar beechwood lay shadowing the crusted surface like dryad-ghosts hankering for a dip. Raymond Hannam had brought sandwiches, and offered a share to Tristram, improvident in his truancy. They sat down on the island to eat. Overhead the Tramp spied a solitary heron's nest; Raymond said he had seen the young ones. "In the summer," he explained, "I come here then to swim. I can't do that next year though; not till the holidays. I shall be going to a big school then: that'll be instead of Bembridge. I shall like a public school better."

Tristram said: "What are they like?"

"Schools?" queried Raymond.

"No," corrected Tristram. "Herons, I meant: young ones like those you saw."

The other only remembered that they had feathers, and

were much like the older birds; he could give no nearer description. About big schools he had much more to say. There were more games there, more larks, more fighting than in smaller schools. Rowing and swimming were what he liked best. He talked as if the brink of the world were before him: just a jump and he would be in it.

Tristram thought him a wonderfully fine fellow; three years' seniority made him almost grown up in the small boy's eyes. At parting Raymond asked whether he was for coming again another day.

Tristram answered: "Yes, to-morrow, if they'll let me out. I ran away from lessons to come here," he explained, and was not the worse thought of for that.

He came home famished, just before dark, and received the discipline of bed and dry fare, as a natural wind-up to the experiences of the day. Marcia stole up to him after dark, and snuggling under an eider-down from the cold heard him loud in the praises of his new friend.

"He's ever so big and strong," cried the boy ecstatically. "He could knock down a man easily. He calls me Tramp, and he says I'm to call him Ray; and he's coming here, too, and I'm to go and see him. I say, Marcia, you will like him! You'll come to-morrow, won't you? Can't he skate, too! What did Miss Binning say when she found I was gone?"

"She asked where you were."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I didn't know. I didn't — not just then; and she never thought of asking where you were going to, so I hadn't to say that."

Marcia, it may be gathered from this, was becoming truthful. As a growing-pain affecting her speech, or a sense of tidiness attaching to facts instead of to things she accepted it with a sort of pride. It sprang not so much out of any instinct or moral notion, as out of self-

consciousness; she told the truth to satisfy herself, — not in the least because she felt that she owed it to other people. Probably we derive most of our virtues from quite unvirtuous motives to begin with, till we hear the world applauding them as good qualities. Marcia started on a good honest home-brew of self-applause.

Tristram's truthfulness went on different lines. He would tell the truth with uncalculating candour, so long as he was not challenged for it; any attempt to hector him into an admission against his will, produced dogged silence. His only reason for not lying was that lying was generally mean; he would be evasive to secure freedom, never to escape punishment.

"That boy of yours has a devil!" said Miss Julia Gavney with becoming conviction to his father one night, when Mrs. Gavney's retirement had left them alone. She had her reasons for putting off the recital till Anna was out of the way; for without any intention to misstate the facts, could not dissociate them from a personal grievance, a reason why the whole truth of the tale were hardly to be learned by the reader, if it were left to her telling. Even the historian states the case with a certain bias.

The affair was a very simple one. Julia had left a sixpence on some packages which awaited the carrier, and on her return the money was missing. Tristram had been seen to go into the room, and owned, when charged, to having gone out by the window. The evidence was sufficient for a lady of hasty logic, whose mind was always at jangle like a bunch of keys, over the details of her energetic housekeeping. To her his absence meant flight; catching sight of him at a distance she went after him at a hot run as though he were an escaping convict: collared him, and cried, "Give me back that sixpence, at once!"

Tristram wished to know what sixpence.

She shook him, saying, "Give it me! If you don't, I turn out your pockets!"

The boy kicked against the violation of his person till overpowered by superior force Many absurd things tumbled into the light of day: nothing that mattered, but the exposure of them roused him to fury. Along with them came a few coppers, but no sixpence; nor did any linings or corners reveal him the culprit.

Julia Gavney's remedy was to take the coppers in present payment for the sixpence. Tristram's was to rush to his mother and declare that his Aunt Julia had been robbing him. She came on his heels and delivered her own version of the affair.

Anna, with her natural conciliatoriness of speech, slipped into wisdom by mere accident. "But, my dear boy, have you really taken it?" she asked.

"No, mother, of course not!" said the boy in a tone of high disdain. And to the "Why then?" of further enquiry, replied, "She never even asked me!"

Miss Gavney was amazed at Anna's weakness of mind when she heard herself invited to make a wider search after the missing coin. But, sure enough, when she lifted the top parcel again from the pile, the thing dropped out of a fold in the brown paper, under which it had slipped; a *dénouement* which cleared Tristram altogether of the charge, and left her looking a little foolish.

Mrs. Gavney had a soft triumph over her sister-in-law, and let it show as she kissed the boy's still flushed and angry face. To Julia, the offence of his innocence was greater than his guilt would have been; its effect was to undermine her authority. "It is a pity Tristram so much dislikes telling the truth, that it has to be dragged out of him!" was the way in which she covered her retreat.

The incident augured ill for their future relations; it showed clear to her view the devil of opposition that was in the boy's nature. She had the faculty, it appeared, for calling it out.

Mr. Beresford Gavney merely thought that the affair proved Tristram to be ripe for heavier tutorial discipline; and suggested that in the coming summer term, he would be old enough to enter as a day-boy the Friars-gate School at Bembridge. As a result of their consultation the Tramp found Latin added to his daily tasks, and when told the reason, could only regret that his years had kept him behind, and that before he arrived at the school, Raymond Hannam would have left it.

Of his new friend he spoke constantly to Marcia, and always with applause. Once or twice she had the opportunity of seeing him when he came up to the Valley House to carry Tristram off on some expedition, or to find sport with him on the grounds. She joined vigorously in their games when invited to, and found it quite easy to dislike the new-comer for a way he had of saying "That's jolly good for a girl!" about things she did quite as well as Tristram. It was a phrase she had taught the Tramp not to use. Doris, too, had kept him free from an early knowledge of masculine superiority.

Seeing clearly that influences of separation were at work between herself and Tristram, Marcia chose characteristically to put the blame of it all on others, and take none on herself. She could not look in and see the change there also at work, undoing the tie of their old boon-companionship, not to be knit again till present phases in both should be past.

One of the first unsettlings of life, which, looking back, we see to have modified so much our appreciation of it as a thing merely of weathers and seasons, is the growth of the moral sense. To the animal in us it is a calamity; to the spiritual at first but a doubtful benefit. The moral sense seldom makes us better at the first infection; only more conscious of the evil that is in us, and a little more disagreeable to our neighbours than we were before. As

a rule, it is the girl who stumbles into it first, obeying the new order with less resistance than her brother in affliction. The misfortune is hers as well as his; she begins to feel deserted, not knowing why; unconscious that she herself has moved, she sees that she is estranged from his side. Hitherto she has been his rib and very good comrade; the half-skirting about her limbs has been a mere accident, carrying with it no present significance. Within that symbol of coming doom, the tomboy has gambolled at large, unabashed and undefiant, having nothing to be ashamed of or to dread. Alas! Greek Atalanta becomes Eve again; and stooping to take up the apples of her maiden sex, finds she may run no more with the same spirit. A lamentable self-consciousness hampers her actions; she consults a self within herself of which she has hitherto been ignorant, and as a whole companion is done for. So, until the youth also has gone through that corresponding state of complexity out of which adolescence has to fret its way, she being bound, he still free, they come naturally to loggerheads, knock and strike sparks, and start asunder, wondering sullenly at the opposition that has come on them. And let her take her share of the shocks as penitentially as she may, he will not value her the better for meekness where incompatibility is the offence. Instead of a support she becomes a flaw in that structure of concealment, which youth with the most moral future before it will rear against the overreachings of authority. Under such circumstances it is quite likely that the girl, though morally the aggressor, suffers more, nor is she consoled that conscience is on her side. Here is the moment in the lives of young Adam and Eve when the gods still deal out poetic justice; and the woman suffers for her importation of the interrogative note of conscience into youth's Eden of the appetites.

"We were twins once," Tristram had said on one occa-

sion of himself and Marcia, his memory catching on a term which had been fictitiously applied to them when their two heads were found on a level. For a much longer time, when physical growth had sent him ahead, they had remained twins in effect. Now the moral law decided for them, that it was no longer to be. Marcia, with the encumbrance of spirit adding itself to flesh, was for the time outgrowing him; she no longer gave to his mind's eye pictures of the world as it ought to be. When she stood up one day before the bar of enquiry like an uprooted mandrake of the earth, her raiment streaming pellets of soil, she confessed at once what she had been doing. "I've been burying myself; at least, Tristram did it; I asked him to." Also she told plain home-truths over the wettings and tearings of her frocks. "It got itself wet," and "It came torn," were no longer terms to satisfy her ear for detail. Conscientiousness never made her a telltale; all the more did it act as a moral deterrent on Tristram. Her betrayals of herself disheartened him; they made his own secrecy seem craven. After one or two despairing efforts to recover her as an accomplice, his spirit forsook her and fled.

Marcia buried her forlorn life in much book-reading, and punished him by the accuracy of her learned lessons, against which he cut but a poor figure. Miss Binning reported that his industry was deteriorating. It was, but not so much as appeared. Hitherto there had been an unwritten compact between the two, by which they had kept each other's shortcomings in countenance: they had only allowed themselves to do so much, or so much; to be word-perfect was counted by them as uppishness. Thus had the rigours of discipline fallen more mildly across backs that were true yoke-fellows. Marcia's morals wrought havoc in that old code of theirs. Tristram resisted the change by doing rather worse.

Thus it came about that war simmered between them, and for his scrapes Tristram chose loneliness. If occasionally, in his search for them, honest accident overtook him, he no longer had an eye-witness at hand to help him out in a good cause; and he found to his surprise that, singly, he bore a reputation for untruthfulness.

One day some error of judgment made from the high bird's-eye-view of authority, had ordered him to a tea of dry bread without butter or jam. The jam chanced to be a particular one; he reached out his hand for it, reasserting his innocence. Restrained by the presiding power, he cast his bread to float in the contents of his tea-cup: though sopped food was distasteful to him, he would not eat *dry* bread, not for all the thunders that were!

It did not mollify him in the least that Marcia, sitting opposite, was joining herself to his cause in this instance by meekly foregoing the syrupy object of his desires, lest comparison should the more inflame his mind. Her kind self-denial only irritated him; with savage contrariness he remarked:

"Why don't you have any jam? Nobody has told lies about *you!* Go on! Eat your own and my share as well! I give it you; nobody else has a right to it!"

This defiant gift of his rights he would at least make, even under the nose of Miss Binning's authority. But Marcia remained a creature of mean spirit, a deserter: she sat and made no sign, lifting up dry mouthfuls.

He turned with more interest to watch the soppy fragments of his own bread being spooned out of his tea-cup. Evasion of the penalty was not to be permitted to him: his tea returned to him crumby and cool from much spilling, and dry bread was again set before him. But having now declared war against food in that form, he would perish rather than own to being hungry.

In the free hour following the conclusion of the meal, Marcia roaming down the pantry passage, sighted Tristram, a figure of guilt, fleeing out of a recess at her approach. The instinct of the chase, rather than any idea of detecting crime, led her to pursuit. She caught him up as he was wrestling with the spring-door to open it. The Tramp with a squeal of rage huddled himself down in a corner, covering some prize under the flap of his coat.

One of the servants went by; Marcia held her tongue, but did not loose him. "What have you there?" she asked, when the coast was clear.

"You mustn't look, Marcia!" he protested; "it's a secret!"

She withdrew honourably, though not convinced. Compunction seized Tristram; such generous dealing forced him to forego deceitful secrecy. He sat up, disclosing a pot of the identical jam of which he had been robbed at tea-time, already ravished of its covering, and indented by tell-tale spoon marks. Tristram had been remedying the injustice of the authorities by a foray on his own account.

Marcia was moved by his voluntary self-betrayal, but was none the less concerned at the revelation. The moral sense made her say:

"Tris, you've been stealing it! You must put it back again."

"No," he protested; "it wasn't fair to do me out of my jam! And besides," he added, "I've begun it now."

There was decided satisfaction in that; the Rubicon had been crossed. In the face of that, let moral questionings hide a diminished head. A bright idea struck him:

"Have half!" he proposed, "you had none at tea either."

Marcia pressed refusing lips over a mouth that watered.

There was, she saw, a plain difficulty over the restitution of the theft; but not the less was what he proposed unjustifiable to her conscience.

"I ought to have had jam for my tea!" insisted Tristram, "and if we were to finish it, a *whole* pot wouldn't be missed; nobody is likely to think of counting them."

It was wicked gospel truth. But Marcia's feminine soul had acquired a dignity lacking to the male.

"You ought not to have done it!" she declared. "Trampy, dear, can't you smooth it down, and put it back again?"

Tristram was dogged on that point; rather would he eat a share, leave the remainder, and be found out. But it was half ruefully, at last, that he sat down in a retired spot to dispose wholesale of the thing he could not restore entire.

Marcia eyed him remorselessly the whole time; and the jam tasted very ill. She even followed him to see how he got rid of the empty jar. Her doing so made that part of his task doubly distasteful; for clearly it was beyond his rights to dispose of the jam-pot: his claim did not extend beyond its contents.

Rolling it conspicuously into the dust heap, he turned upon her resentfully. "Now, go and tell!" he sneered. "Girls are all sneaks!"

He knew this statement to be untrue, but to set injustice against injustice relieved his feelings. After sulking for the rest of the evening as in duty bound, he was for regarding the incident as closed.

He was mistaken. It was not until tea-time the next day that the moral sense began to unmask the full aspect of its tyranny. For three weeks from that date, with faithful regularity, Marcia puzzled Miss Binning, and admonished her brother by refusing jam to her tea. Tristram took it all the more, in large helpings, as fodder

to his wrath, hoping by such callous defiance to rouse her; but he made no impression. To Miss Binning, who sought a private explanation, she said, "Trampy was unfairly punished last week, that's why!" A remark which made Miss Binning believe that she saw the true culprit now before her, doing penance in a fashion of her own choosing.

Marcia was let alone to complete it. She was angelically sweet-tempered through it all, going out of her way to show Tristram that she bore him no grudge, that this merely was duty. She was indeed very sorry for him, and for herself too, while the three weeks lasted.

Tristram watched her, trying to make out what new creature was this; the downright tyranny of the experiment was what chiefly struck his mind. And while his brain mazed, he questioned within his rankled bosom how a girl could so smile and smile, and yet be a villain!

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH A GENTLE CHARACTER DISAPPEARS FROM THE STORY

SPRING was again showing bright edges of green, and the walks which Doris had made familiar to the children's feet grew alive with memories of her as, group by group, the flowers rushed back to the places of her ramblings.

To Tristram they almost cried her name. An epistolary fervour seized him; he seemed for a whole winter to have forgotten her. Now he pestered his mother to send to her the great handfuls of wild-flowers he brought home: they were all for his Aunt Doris. By the sea, he appeared to think, there could be no flowers.

A few specimens his mother consented to slip between the pages of her correspondence; but such things as wood-anemones were too perishable for forwarding; it seemed better merely to send word of the will that was in him.

Doris, hearing of the boy's floral mood, sent to enquire after her own garden. He fell to energetic upheavals of its soil, and sent her lists of the things which were appearing. He even probed beneath the surface to spy the whereabouts of late comers; many a tender green nose got frost-nipped in consequence.

One day he drove over with his mother to Little Towberry, where certain matters required to be arranged for

its absent mistress; and fell into a sort of awe over the oppression of the shut-up house, once so full of life.

The caretaker opened shutters to let in light; and while Mrs. Gavney turned over the contents of carefully arranged drawers, Tristram looked out on a desolate garden.

"Why does nobody do anything to this garden?" he asked. "Doesn't Auntie Dorrie mean ever to come back here?"

His mother had just got her hand on one of the things she sought. "Come here, Tristram!" she called to him. "This is for you." She held out a little miniature; in it were blue eyes and a face he knew.

"Oh!" he cried, looking, "that is Auntie Dorrie, I know!" and realising he was to be its possessor, fell into extravagant love for it during the rest of the day.

His mother studied him in gentle perplexity, puzzled at the wild tenderness which had broken out of his roughened surface. She sent word of it to Doris.

"Ah!" wrote that dear lady out of her fast banishment, "if I could be given one selfish wish now, it would be to see you again, and him! Dear, I write it down only the more to forbid it: you must not come! (let good news of your health come instead!), and the other thing is out of the question. Besides I am sure that I am much better, so the need can wait."

In a later letter she asked that out of her own plot of garden Tristram should send her one gathering of its spring-beauties as a proof of his stewardship. May was beginning then, and letters were no longer in her own handwriting.

The letter arrived late one evening; Tristram had the message when he went in to say good-night to his parents. His mother kissed him with a troubled countenance as she told him. "To-morrow, dear," she said. It was then

dark; but the boy was in a fever to be off at once into the garden, and pick his flowers ready for the first morning post. It seemed to him an act of unfaithfulness to postpone fulfilment of the request. Mrs. Gavney whispered, "Do as I say, dear; to-morrow will be time enough." And he went.

She came up to his room just as he was getting into bed, and asked: "Tristram, have you said your prayers?"

"Oh yes, I think so!" said the boy doubtfully, with one leg out. He was quite willing to do them again to make sure.

Did he pray, she asked him, for his Aunt Doris?

"Oh yes, I do, mother," he said; "always for her."

She left him then, saying no more. A quarter of an hour later Marcia came into the room and got on to the bed beside him. "Trampy," she cried out in the dark. "Auntie Dorrie is ill!"

"Oh, it's not true!" said he, but pulled himself up quickly from under the bed-clothes.

"It is! Mother told me; and I know it's true from the way she said it."

"How did she say it?"

"Oh!" Marcia shook herself for an explanation she could not give. A gloomy conviction pervaded her that "ill" meant very ill; she did not spare to speak her thoughts to him. She talked into pitch darkness; her voice over his head seemed to move to and fro in a sort of stumble across his senses. He became sick with dread that there was reason in what she uttered, only he wished and wished that she would leave off speaking of it: to argue in the dark was like kicking against a blank wall.

Presently she said, "I'm cold; I'm going back to bed again. Good-night, Tramp." They exchanged kisses, a thing rare between them now, except after quarrels; she stole off to her own room again, leaving him in a fer-

ment of unreasoning remorse over the days when mindfulness of Doris and the service due to her had been put aside or forgotten.

In the middle of the night Marcia, a heavy sleeper, grew half awake with a belief that she saw Tristram by her side, clothed and standing, a dim figure between her and the open door. What he said she did not understand. She turned afresh, cheek to pillow, and lost consciousness; then starting suddenly awake looked up to see sure enough that the door stood open. "Trampy!" she called; but there was no answer. She was in doubt if he had been there at all.

It would be hard to say in what state of consciousness Tristram had left his bed. What he could recall the next day gave but a half of his troubled movements during the night. He remembered his visit to Marcia and his finding her in too heavy a sleep to be stirred, but could not account for the few poor pullings of flowers, bare stalks, bruised and crumbled grass which lay scattered on the floor by his bedside. They seemed a feeble expression of the great wish which had filled and broken his night's rest.

Day dawned gloomy; he woke late and found that the desire had worn itself out; it lay in him now with the weight of a leaden duty to be done. Nevertheless before many minutes he was out of the house to find a chill air blowing over the ground where there had of late been rain. Across the borders of Doris's garden, he saw upon the mould fresh footprints between the flowers, and wondered if they could be his own. Solitary he felt at that chill gathering, a Dante missing his Beatrice.

Close on the breakfast hour he returned from his task, bearing a double handful of flowers: Marcia met him with a strange face. Something of a hush had taken hold of the establishment. She looked at the flowers, then at him.

"No, no, Trampy!" she said; "mother mustn't see them!" and told him in a quick whisper the news that had just come into the house, of grief not many hours old. His hands became insensible of what they held. Staring at her for an amazed moment with a stunned sense of shame, he tried to believe that he had heard foolishly something not true; yet did not dare to ask for it to be repeated to him. Marcia told him that the news had come by telegram; their mother was expecting it, she held it for a long time unopened, weeping bitterly. Tristram remembered to have seen the messenger not many minutes ago, returning down the drive; and with the prosaic vision presented, the reality darted into him like a wound into the flesh. He spun round, letting the flowers fall in a heap, and raced out into the garden.

Marcia saw him at top speed, disappearing down the field under the terrace; and the practical thought that he was gone without his breakfast crossed her mind to call up troubled pity for him, and remained when long hours brought no sign of his return.

In the afternoon she watched for him out of an upper window, and spied him at last creeping into the stables by a back way. She found him in the dark of the small granary, munching at a handful of corn.

"Tris," she said, "mother has been wanting to know where you are."

"Tell her I am here!" mumbled the boy.

"But she wants you. I think she's ill."

"How ill?" he asked.

"Lying down in the dark; I don't know: she hardly speaks."

"What time is it?" enquired Tristram. She told him.

A few minutes later there was a rub at Mrs. Gavney's door. Her sigh gave him admittance to the veiled still-

ness of the chamber. A small body climbed up and lay down on the bed by her side.

"Mother?"

"My boy."

The two faces fell to an embrace on the same pillow.

"Are you going to die, too, mother?" he asked.

"Oh, no, my dear, not yet."

"Where are you ill, then?"

She murmured, "My head!" and let his hands feel their way to a hot tortured forehead.

"I won't talk!" he said; and they lay silent for some while, side by side, only his hands giving her news of him.

After a while she whispered, "I feel better!" and began speaking on the subject they had at heart. Little tales of the childhood of Doris stole from her sad lips. "She was the merriest child I ever knew!" came, and had a story to fit it. "She was so pretty! as long as I can remember quite the prettiest of us all; and I remember the first time she was put into my arms."

Anna sighed, but had no more tears to give; in this evening of her grief Doris seemed to smile at her through a clear-washed space of atmosphere. At each pause she heard Tristram murmur, "Tell me more, mother!" and still found much to say.

After a time, as she went on, she began to notice that his hands were quite cold against her face; and to ease him of the strain, "I am better, dear," she said, "oh, much better!" and was surprised to find it so true. "Put down your hands now; they must be tired."

There was no response, nor movement beyond a low breathing. Soon Anna found that she had him fast asleep in her arms; and all her heart went motherly and warm to make a nest for the poor small animal which had crept to her for comfort of its wants.

" It needs a mother to understand him," she thought to herself, and with that grew consoled over all the aspects of his troublesomeness. She lay quite out of pain now, comforted in her gentle pride by the feeling that she and her boy were not strangers. The thought smiled tenderly to her that Doris by dying had afforded proof that Doris could be a little wrong.

CHAPTER XII

SCHOOL-DAYS AND HOLIDAYS

IN the life of childhood Earth re-acts her story; there the parable of her creation becomes told again in small, and leads on to a very similar end. Creation in its completion leaves man, an interrogating mind, face to face with the tree whose fruit it is peril for him to taste of; and with the fall that follows, creation proper may be said to have ended, and civilisation, the problem-play, the fabrication of a single species, as opposed to the consenting movement of a whole order, to have begun. Even so do we come to a point in the life of man where childhood, the natural creation, is done for and the artificial recipe of civilisation takes its place; when the raw roots of him have to go into the stews and flesh-pots which hands, not Nature's, have prepared.

Or we may make the parable more personal to the individual, and see in childhood once again the forming of the first man. Taken up out of common earth, he receives in his nostrils breath already sweet with scents of quickening for his soul. The doors of his being sway freely to the draughts of Heaven; large natural inspirations predominate in the stir-about of his blood. Memory looking back, thereafter has the burden of knowing that healthier motions then went to the balance of his being than when civilisation in him was completed. Surely it was better for his mere happiness when each thing in

Nature had its own broad meaning, unassociated with man's sad right of usufruct; when sheep in the fields did not stand for meat, nor grass for fodder, nor roads for the dull jointing of trade, nor women for travail, nor men for labour, but all were alike useless and wonderful things, to be enjoyed as the uninstructed senses might direct; when desire held up a cup to catch the whole reflection of the sun, and drank, not wine, but the light and warmth of Heaven.

Your average man-child gets an abrupt addition to his first principles of knowledge when he goes forth from his home to become one in the educational community. Caught and set down in no garden, but a walled town, he stands before the Tree of Knowledge under a new law; and, "Thou *shalt* eat of it!" is now the word of command. That is well enough; as logical followers of Adam, since we aim not to reverse his record, we do rightly to exalt his deed and eat of the same damnation. But time has caused the Tree to throw out rank seedlings, and the city of Wisdom whose high places it crowns has its slums also — outskirts which lie to be crossed by the infarer. And is it not amazing, if you think of it, that we are content to let the slums give to the raw citizen his first dip into new knowledge, that we let him run loose into by-ways where the gutter is almost the only footpath to walk in? And meanwhile the human parent, smug worshipper of the conventional sanctities, stands like an ostrich, burying an obtuse head from all avoidable recognition of consequences.

The fact is but stated here as a short means to history, where unattractive ground has to be crossed over: a reminder in brief of how in the first years of schooling the Devil holds his confirmation classes, so that, if you become not his converts henceforth, it is not his fault nor the fault of your sponsors. At least he makes sure that

youth shall no longer be the same thing, for here a line, sharp as the furrow of a sacrificial knife, is drawn over the human body; and at a blow the life of childhood is ended.

The reader knows by now that it is no life of a saint we are recording. In Tristram's nature influences of good and bad were for ever at touch and go. As the arrow must be free for the string that sends it, so with him for a motion to have weight it was essential that he should be at liberty to fly. In this new Antaeus the instinct of the spiritual law is not come at by fasting and holy obedience, and if you find him ever on his knees, 'tis as the half-way sign of a grace in him whose whole aim is a full-length roll on the tawny clay of mother-earth.

The beginning of autumn saw Tristram entered as a day-scholar at the Friars-gate school of Bembridge, with a two miles' stretch of limb morning and evening to make an acceptable sandwich of the food there forced upon his brain. He went believing he would like better than anything the social contact of his own kind which school promised him; but in the event he found himself lonelier with a crowd than with a few.

Friars-gate, as then constituted, was a foundation of mixed condition and history, a compromise between claims deriving from an old pious endowment of pre-reformation times and the acquisitiveness which marks in educational matters the upper middle classes of our own day; for the benefits of the institution had been largely transferred to a class higher in the social scale than the one which the charitable founder had originally in view. The school still existed by right of an ancient charter, which secured twenty scholarships to sons of the Bembridge townspeople: it prospered on more modern lines as a proprietary boarding-house, where the sons of gentry were trained for a University career. A certain social differ-

ence, in consequence, marked these two constituent bodies of the school. As a day-boy, there was to some extent also a separation of interests.

Tristram found himself one of a race somewhat looked down on by those whose presence gave the school its standing, but who, as regards the original intention of the founders, were interlopers. Many names were bandied between the two parties, expressive of a continuous small friction, which, not generally amounting to much, was never quite absent. The daily arrivals from the outer world were scornfully reminded of the plebeian dust they bore about them by the appellation of "Door-mats." They responded with an elegant feat in *tu quoque* by naming as "Bed-brats" those who slept on the premises. Epithets, first fired in mutual derision by opposing wits of one generation, stuck and became the common phraseology of school-life; in time these produced playful variations, coming in pairs for the most part, the result of repartee. Thus the "Doorers" was a hit which produced the "Snorers" as a more successful counterstroke on the day-boy side. The "Dormers" and the "Attics" were paler comparisons, lacking in contrast of meaning; while the "Dormice" and the "Bedouins" made a sheer turnover of the significance with which this war of words had started. They are set down here merely that, in use hereafter, they may be understood at their poor native worth — the efforts of crude wit in a race which, starting from Shakespeare himself, has always had more difficulty in making a tolerable play on language, than in turning it to humorous extravagance. Shakespeare and your average school-boy pun very much on a par.

At the date of Tristram's coming to Friars-gate the school's fortunes were under the direction of one who held the old-fashioned claim to tutorial office of a Doctor's degree of Divinity. Without the "Doctor" his name,

Coney, made an insufficient fitting to a massive presence wherein weight and dignity stood ponderously balanced. The nickname applied to him by his scholars behind his back had also been inadequate, but that its double meaning saved it; for "Beak," applied as it undoubtedly had been in the first instance to his chief facial characteristic, bore also a magisterial significance; and the magisterial side of him was not lost upon those who came under his tutelage. It had made the school what it was. He was a man presenting that marble majesty of front which provokes the irreverent from a distance to utter high ridicule, but is formidable when confronted. Only once in each month was the school able to vent before his face any whisper of the disrespect it strove hard to cherish. The whisper was in fact a roar; for to that grew the dull perfunctory mumblings of response, when, at evening prayer in the school-chapel upon each twentieth day, the red-letter verse of the whole psalter came to be recited. "And so are the stony rocks for the conies," was the cry, which would then rise in crescendo off three-score rebellious tongues, and straightway the hubbub would die down again till another month should renew to their lips that delirious draught of an inspired utterance.

The Doctor stood with an unmoved face while that safety-valve uttered its steam in outrageous attack upon his ears; causing thereby very much debate whether he was aware at all of the provocation hurled at him. "Stony rock" was indeed his refuge; behind that marble none could guess whether lay dark ire or amusement at the paltry satisfaction of the herd. Young Coney, who held the difficult position of eldest son to his father and schoolfellow to those who felt his father's sway, assured curious enquirers that he did not know his parent's mind on the subject. But it was to that youth's credit that he was no filterer of news through his double relationship to tutor

and tutored; and as he had earned an honourable name for carrying no tales out of school, so too, maybe was it his rule to bring none in. His school-fellows, even when mischief was afoot, could see undismayed the Doctor walking with his hand on his son's shoulder, and be without suspicion of foul-play or countermine. Moreover, in class he had the virtue of being quite as much afraid of the Beak in his father as any of the others. The sight of Tom Coney trembling like the rest of them over his stumbles in construe, gave the school an added sense of respect towards a power whose affection never showed itself through favour; and though it could not be doubted that the Doctor was a despot by nature, and something of a bully, a sharp assault on his central dignity was needed to make him unfair or vindictive in the penalties he imposed. If hereafter we see him and our hero at loggerheads, it will be because the latter went wilfully to the attack, with his eyes well open: nor is the reader to think that records of hair-brained adventure, however moving, are set down here to throw any colour of virtue over proceedings in themselves doubtful. It is the picturesque and not the moral side of things which must commend itself to the historian of Tristram's youth, whereof movement was the most essential characteristic — movement carrying with it its proper complement of occasional immobility, which in the moral category would have to be prejudiced under the term obstinacy. And if out of a non-moral presentment a moral is sought to this story, I say that, over every donkey's back amongst us, morals hang in pairs like panniers; and that when the weight of them has broken it for him you shall have the two to choose from, to find in which of them lay the last straw that caused his overthrow.

But for the present Tristram's life piles its records less in the restraint of his school-hours than in the loosenings

of his vacations. The Doctor's verdict on him at the end of his first term was, "He has a mind, but fails to apply it," and the reports of his class-masters carried the same accusation. No definite charge of idleness was made against him; one of the most lenient of his instructors put the case sympathetically: "If a window is open in the room where he is at work, his brain flies out of it." And the remark gave just the right colour to his lack of industry. The end of term was like a window set open to him: on the last day he raced home in rapturous spirits, and seemed quite pleased with himself: merely to have endured through the first three months of his schooling seemed to him an achievement almost for boasting.

Two days later young Raymond Hannam was also home again at Little Alwyn. Tristram found him loud in praise of his new school; and it seemed to matter little to his pride that he, too, was near the bottom of his class. The difference between the two boys lay in this, that whereas the Tramp cared nothing for the school-life from which holiday gave him an escape, Raymond found in it all that he had longed for. He preached its joys to a heart that showed little wish to be converted.

"I'd like to be wherever you are, Ray," said Tristram, busy twining new heart-strings, "but there isn't much else about it I think I'd care for." He hinted a distaste for the companionship of his own kind; and of school-games said he did not care for them.

It was an odd outcome, for the boy had tremendous energy and animal spirits. He had been through his first fight, and rather liked it; though he was in doubt whether he had lost or won. "We got tired and left off," he said, in telling Raymond; "I offered to go on again next day, but we forgot all about it." So it would seem he and his antagonist had fought for the mere mood, and been satisfied. Hearing of it, his friend began teaching him to

box, that he might "lick any fellow of his own size." It was Ray's idea that as a good fighter he would become popular and like his school-life better. Yet, in the event, Tristram fought but one other battle before he left Bembridge.

The two boys became inseparable. Marcia was allowed to hear of doings in which she had less and less of a part. When at last she went to share the schooling of some cousins at their own home, the separation of her life from Tristram's would have been almost complete, had not ruth and inclination then turned him into a correspondent. In absence, his heart returned to her; and she found herself on paper taken back into his confidence in a way that recalled the old days, for, with scrapes that had already happened she could safely be trusted; nor was it her trick to preach, when she wrote back to him. Thus, she learned astonishing things that never reached the ears of her elders, and had a map of his life that to them was so much unknown country. Raymond's flag flew over most of it.

That first term and the holidays following were typical of a good many that came after. In the summer vacation it became necessary to order Tristram to be at home for at least one meal a day, besides breakfast. The injunction followed Miss Julia Gavney's discovery that it was not at the Vicarage that her nephew made up for meals missed at home. Mr. Hannam washed his hands in innocency as to the general whereabouts of the boys' ramblings. "I don't know where they go," he said, "but they come back safe enough; mine does, that is to say."

For the father of a youth just arriving at the age called "difficult," he seemed singularly incurious. He astonished Miss Gavney by appearing to regard Tristram as a sort of safeguard to his own bigger offspring. "I find him

a nice little fellow," he asserted under correction. "He's as troublesome as they make them!" declared Miss Julia, and told an anecdote or two.

The vicar's "Dear me!" was uttered in mere politeness, receptive of a point of view that passed straightway out of mind. His thoughts went back to the parish matters, wherein he felt his only true responsibility.

His wife had made the mistake of leaving him a widower with one boy to look after; the mistake was hers, not his. He did his duty so far as the object of it came under his eye, but could hardly be expected to divert himself from his work, on account of one who showed a nice manly faculty for looking after himself. He came out of his clouds to administer a rebuke now and again, and was always gratified to find how well the boy took his occasional displays of authority. Raymond came to his father for extra pocket-money with a quite ingenuous confidence in their relations, and answered all questions frankly. On these grounds his father was ready to swear that he had a boy of good honest character to deal with, one without much brain, but enough for the Church, to which he destined him. If in holiday time Raymond chose the son of so advantageous a neighbour as Mr. Beresford Gavney for a companion, Mr. Hannam trusted that he need trouble himself no further in the matter. So long as Raymond came home of nights, he was free to go far a-field in the day-time. Thus the companionship secured extra freedom for them both.

If to get far a-field was his aim, Raymond found that in this one thing the Tramp was ahead of him, and, though not aspiring to be his leader, proved himself a born guide. He knew the country as far a-foot as they cared to go to quite an astonishing degree. He knew the people also. Up at the Beacon Farm, he assured Raymond, there was food and a welcome for them whenever

they liked to go. And it was not the only homestead to which the same hospitable truth applied. "I'm going to be a farmer!" said Tristram, and when occasion offered, showed he could handle a pitchfork as to the manner born. He could use sickle or scythe, too, and bind a sheaf. He pointed out to Raymond a sheep he had helped to shear; but had to confess he knew it by a certain scar on its side. The farmer to whom it belonged vowed it was none the worse mutton for a little blood-letting. Tristram professed himself a connoisseur in cider; at Beacon Farm there was a story against him on the point, telling how in his raw ignorance, he had been beguiled and overcome by the potent beverage, and had been carried up to bed to recover from the novel effects of his initiation into alcohol as a thirst-quencher. The farmer's offer of more cider now ever took the stereotyped form of "And do'ant yo' spare it, Muster Tristram; yor bed be upstairs, made." This, with a waggish turn of the head, suggesting that the memory was worth recalling.

Raymond owned that his friend had cheek beyond his own when one dark night, hungry, belated, and far from home, Tristram's soft tongue got them mounted up by the coachman of a carriage returning to its stables, and in the end set down to sup off dishes that came straight from the table of a country magnate. The boy had an easy faculty for getting at the sociable side of men, even of that haughty under-aristocracy, which as a rule is most unbending to those a little above it in the social scale. Nevertheless over this particular episode his conscience showed an uneasiness. He pleaded to Ray their ravenous state of hunger for an excuse, and cleared out his own and his friend's pockets in a gratuity to the butler, who had acted as mine host to them over his master's wine and viands. "It wouldn't have done, would it," he enquired, "to have offered help him wash-up?" The awk-

wardness of the final thanksgiving taught him in future to prefer yeomen and cottagers, people with whom he could feel on an equality. "Why," he wondered, "does being in the households of lords and high gentry make the serving classes less human?" Raymond thought incongruous imitation and the high pampering of coarse grain did the mischief: an eternal aping of habits and manners that didn't belong to them. "Share a kennel with a blood-hound," said he, "and you catch his fleas, not his breed." He instanced the Hill Alwyn establishment — every man Jack of them with the temper and expletives of its mistress, — curses caught down from on high, and sent the rounds. Talking of curses — the alcoholic elements of speech — Raymond said, "D'you know old Haycraft?" and proposed an early excursion to the old man's domain. "He keeps ferrets," was added as an inducement; and the morrow saw them on the confines of Randogger, where the old scamp had his abode.

Of all the country lying between Hill Alwyn and Hiddenden, north and south, Pitchley and Compton Covey, east and west, the true centre was Randogger. Many-roofed Bembridge sat apart, — only on market-days a rallying-point for all the scattered rustic community. Randogger's single roof, green and sparsely inhabited, laid the weight of its solitude with almost hourly insistence on the rough-grained life of the whole district. One who understood the locality could judge with sufficient accuracy by the build of the homesteads and the appearance of their inhabitants, in what relation they stood to the country's main feature. 'Twas a centralisation that betokened a veritable moral aloofness from the hurrying of the age: a stranger was a marked man in the quiet cart-tracks which threaded these wood-ways.

Randogger, for all its complexity, had a singular unity;

the eye ranging over it from higher ground saw only an impressive monotony. "Where is anything?" one might say, if in search for landmarks. Yet a closer investigation showed how life lay round it in concentric rings like the rind enclosing a tree, till the inner ring was quick with the growth and sap of the wood itself. Tree-like, it threw random seedlings of itself; or, let us say, like some great fowl with brood bulging from beneath its wing, whence here and there ran a straggler, recognisable still, a fledgling of the common nest. The neighbourhood was named after its offspring. Here and there, at the distance of a few fields, lay Pedlar's Thicket, Wooton Hatch, Rippenstow, and the Quarry Coppice; Hill Alwyn Wood itself seemed but a lusty straggler gone farther than the rest. Tucked into a corner of this last, between it and Randogger Edge, Parson's Copse affronted the symmetry of the larger estate. It was glebeland attaching to the living of Little Alwyn, and in the days gone by had been the cause of standing feud between Parson and Squire.

Those were days when Parson was a week-day sportsman, and Squire sucked liquor in curtained privacy to relieve the tedium of the Sunday's sermon. In this parish they fell to feud: the man of God was the first to take up the cudgels. The Squire, Parson averred, poked his fire and clinked his glasses when pulpit-eloquence grew wearisome to him. And would! vowed the irate magnate: he knew a good sermon when he heard it — which was seldom; and his pew was his own property: he was not to be ousted from that, — he would behave there how he chose, and would apply cushions external and internal to suit his own comfort! Week-day partnership in the stubble was thenceforth over between them. "My pew," the Parson forthwith nicknamed his bit of copse, and bagged on it more game than his due. "You poke when I preach, I poach while you preserve!" was his way of

putting the case. On that text he secured a substantial revenge. They took to shooting each other's dogs; and in all ways set a strange example of Christianity for the parish to look up to. One bleak winter's day sent a blast which flared out after a brief draught the vital fire animating the body of each. It was recorded that on his deathbed the parson ate pheasant, and died two full days earlier in consequence.

With their deaths the personal squabble came to an end, but a traditional coldness passed on to their successors. Now, in Lady Petwyn's day, the manorial pew stood unoccupied; but the parson's "pew" had a tenant, and something of the old grievance was revived. Mr. Theodore Hannam, the vicar, not himself a sportsman, without an intention of malice, had let the place go to a wrong occupant. Haycraft now had a lease and could not be turned out. While Sir Cooper Petwyn was drinking to his own riddance, there had been little game-preserving on the estate, and Haycraft's methods had not mattered. When, under bailiffs and keepers, things were set in order once more, stern eyes and complaint were directed against him. It was the old parson's game that he was playing.

Lady Petwyn wrote of him to Mr. Hannam as, "your poacher by Church established," and at length made a point of sending no game to the Vicarage. There could be no doubt she had a grievance. Haycraft had poaching in his blood, and by a shrewd stroke of wit the old marauder had procured a settlement for his old age which satisfied his instincts. He made his bit of wood attractive to the pheasants of the neighbouring estate, and could be heard by the keepers potting merrily at birds he had done nothing to rear. Hard words were bandied to and fro across the boundaries; but Haycraft, for all his roughness of tongue, had an imperturbable temper, and would

offer to sell his filchings when emptier fists were shaken at him.

The vicar was brought at last to remonstrate. Haycraft swore that he bred birds of his own. He did, to the extent of a single sitting of pheasants' eggs each year, and took so little care of them that the rats and stoats of the neighbourhood carried most of them away. On the strength of that outlay he bagged weekly through five months of the year, and sold in the market birds which had cost his neighbour much and him nothing.

Over at the Vicarage it was his office to be useful twice a week as odd-jobber; the employment fitted into a knack he had of getting through a day's work without any show of energy. Look at him, you would say he was a loafer: test his muscle, you would believe he had had his day as a prize-fighter. Whatever records he held in that direction had been achieved far a-field; now, only a wild outlandish reverie of eye told something of an adventurous life over which his lips shut fast. He was never to be seen in a hurry, never in drink, never in a temper, and never in church. By comparison with many of his neighbours he could say that this was to have a good character.

On the Church question, his parson tackled him; he listened dutifully, and at the end let go a fervent utterance, expressive of a mind fully prepared for the great change. "When a' can do no more rotting and robbiting, Parson, then a'll be ready and willing for the Lord to take me." In that submission concluded his creed; could a body in reason, he asked, say more? On the stroke of that hour he would be as ready with his "*Nunc dimittis*" as any saint in the calendar. The vicar spoke to him of his language, which was bad enough in the village, and far worse when the game-controversy was on up at his own holding. He contended that language was

given to a man to defend himself from the assaults of his enemies; it was a matter of give and take. He called his pastor to witness that he had never to him used words unscriptural; and held the fact up as a proof of his innocence with the world at large.

Haycraft was still reckoned to be the tallest man on Randogger side, though his shoulders had now begun to stoop, and his sap to run dry. Thirty years before he had disappeared from the neighbourhood under some cloud; and from that day nothing was heard of him save, from across the county, a vague rumour that he had been seen among gipsies at Bambury fair, with Welsh ponies for sale; till one night, ten years before the date of the present chapter, he had turned up again in his native place, carrying a child on his arm, with money enough in his pocket to make some show at the village alehouse. It was told of him that he stood treat, and took treat on that occasion with every villager who entered the inn-parlour, and at the end of the ordeal was as sober in his skin as a man need be. Those present on the occasion could relate how, through the whole of that carouse, the child had slept in the rigid circle of his arm, only waking once to cry "Mammy!" and be strictly hushed back again to sleep in tones of command; and of Haycraft's face, how it bore marks of conflict, seeming to have run the gauntlet of terrible buffetings; yet how his eye, what was left of it, carried a victorious light.

"Here I am home again!" he had said; and no other word was vouchsafed or asked as to what lay behind.

This was the man, now in his sere and yellow leaf from a tempestuous past, whom Raymond was taking Tristram to visit.

They found him among his guns in the low-beamed kitchen of his cottage by Randogger Edge; the place seemed a tool-shed more than a living-room; ferrets

squirmed in a corner near the door; nets and other tackle lay about; yet the abode had an appearance of cleanliness and was draughted through by fresh air. Behind the old fellow's chair sat a young girl basket making. She looked up bright-eyed as the two boys entered; after that she shook forward a thick mane of black hair, and seemed by the act to be shutting herself off from observation, and from consciousness of anything that went on outside her own task.

Haycraft had bidden the boys in, without rising from his seat, gruffly enough; but the question of the ferrets set his hinges rustily in motion. He swung his great length up till he stood near to the roof, then dropping two of the vermin into the mouth of a capacious pocket, led the way round toward the warren behind the house. The Tramp began to consider his face; it was keen, with a sort of stagnant intelligence, a face behind which the processes of thought moved cumbrous and slow. The impression he got was of one whose ear was attuned less to human voices than to the sounds given forth by trees, whose eye took in the indications of the weather for a week ahead. He had, in fine, wisdom with which the boy wished to communicate.

Raymond named his friend. "Oh, ah," said the old fellow, "I know 'im; I've seed 'im when he haven't seed me. Times I 'ave." He turned a slow look of scrutiny on to the boy's face. Tristram thrilled queerly, and wondered where and in what way his solitude had been spied on.

Haycraft went on slowly, "Collecks eggs, don't yer?" adding with an ironic chuckle, "I seed 'im ater a pheasant's one day. Lord, if Mr. MacAllister had caught yer; he'd a g'en yer what for!"

He asked further what particular eggs he wanted. Tristram named a few.

"When we come back to the house, you ask my Liz to show you what she's got; maybe she'll sell you some."

Tristram said, "I don't care to buy them, I want to get them myself."

"Oh," said the old fellow, "you be a sportsman. I likes 'em hatched."

He indicated the gun across his shoulder: one of his many industries was to supply naturalists with specimens. When they came back into the house, Haycraft, with scarcely more than a sign, bade his daughter up and get down her egg-boxes for the young gentleman to see. Tristram bent over the hoard and saw things that he coveted.

The girl gave him monosyllabic information as to where they had been found. She had king-fisher's eggs; touching them he seemed to see the haunts of that shy bird, and its flight like a blue flame; ever a stroke that made magic to his eye. Settling the box-lid back to its place, his hand rested for a moment upon hers. "Got anything else?" he asked. Her fingers uncurled under his, and let them in to where a dormouse lay nesting within the hollows of her palm; no word was said.

Caressing the little beast, their two hands fell into familiarity, cradle and coverlet to the drowsy life curled between. Their eyes met and struck friendship.

To Ray's observation she seemed of a sulky breed. He said so on the road home. The Tramp's answer was but to wish he had known how to get at all the eggs she had shown him. She was without books, yet could lay her finger unerringly on every egg after its kind, could tell him what differentiated the markings of one from another, and needed no labels to remind her of knowledge gathered at Nature's breast. A sort of envious cupboard-love grew in him for an adept whose faculties were clearly ahead of his own. Had the boy's thoughts run less on collector

lines, he might have remembered her by the dormouse asleep in the hollow of her palm. That small indication of her love of soft things to touch he forgot at the time, though over it for a moment they had made friends.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHAPTER OF PURSUITS

A FEW months later the boys were together again, making the most of the four weeks following on Christmas. On one of their last days of holiday they went off to a meet on the outskirts of Pedlar's Thicket. With luck, and intelligence to forecast events, it was possible for one on foot to see a good part of the run, always supposing it avoided the fiasco of a breakaway, into the depths of Randogger. It was difficult country; but foxes were plentiful, and carried on traditions to which skilful huntsmen had learned to play up. Steadfast pedestrians attending each meet might hope to see something of the finish at least twice in a season. A cut over Beacon Hill at the right moment, in the direction of Fox's Gully, was in nine cases out of ten the thing to reckon for; the hunt that had vanished to the west would reappear setting eastward once more, on a last scamper back to the borders of Randogger. There below the eye, the last heat decided itself; often it was in favour of the fox.

The boys went off to the meet in high spirits, for they knew the country-side, and were confident of their powers. On the road they were passed by sharp-trotting riders in twos and threes. Young Hannam seemed to know most of them: one he saluted was a lady who came riding solitary, with a bleak face and dark imperious eye. Tristram had his first sight of Lady Petwyn. Behind

her back Raymond made a wry face. "Look how she rides, though!" he was forced to exclaim. "She's a capital old Tartar!"

"But she isn't old," objected Tristram.

"See her off horseback and you'd say so!" said his friend. "She's fifty-five if she's a day. Goes mostly on one leg: no one sees her hardly except riding."

"Is that why she never comes to Church?"

"No; or, if it is, it's the least reason. She'd loathe the notion. My father says she's a veritable pagan. 'Old humgruffin' is my name for her."

The subject of their discussion had disappeared from view, when a groom came clattering down the road behind them, and pulled up to ask: "Mr. Raymond, has my lady been along?"

Raymond nodded him ahead: the man was off. He vanished over the rise to reappear presently, retracing his way at double speed.

"Didn't you find her?" Raymond sang out.

"Find her? Yes; damn her, I did!" cried the man in irate tones, and was gone.

The boys laughed. Raymond said: "That's what she's like. Jove! she's always scratching and fighting them. But she keeps them, and they stick to her. It's her money, I suppose. She's a generous old jade; you may give her that!"

Tristram queried — then, how about Cob's Hole, and the poor people living there in ram-shackle hovels at high rent: all workers on the estate.

"Oh," explained Ray, "that's where MacAllister, the bailiff, comes in: he's a skin-flint, and has his pickings, you bet!"

Upon the field they saw Lady Petwyn again, and heard her in high voice and spirits to the men gathered about her. Ladies eyed her distantly. It was Tristram's

first glance into the social grades; but the sight, had he been old enough to calculate on its significance, would have been misleading: Lady Petwyn's reputation stood high; and the distance, for the most part, was of her own choosing.

The hounds were already at work in the adjoining wood. Lady Petwyn cast an eye round for her missing man. She signalled Raymond across to her. "If we're off," she said, "when my fool returns, send him to wait in the lower lane below Beacon Farm; that'll be safe unless we go altogether in the other direction, then, he must simply follow, and catch me up when he can."

Raymond said, "But I shan't be here, Lady Petwyn!"

She said brusquely, "Then I ask you to be. I can't risk going without my food. If you like to bring it on yourself, tell him to mount you: you ride?"

Raymond produced a packet of his own and presented it with a gallant air. It indicated the farthest he would do for the satisfaction of her whims.

"Good!" said the lady, and took it without more ado. "Exchange is no robbery."

Raymond returned to his companion, chuckling over her graspingness and lack of conscience. "They say she's the greediest woman in the county, and I believe it now!" he declared, prompted by personal loss; and in that at least did the dame an injustice, since it was more the imperative demands of disease than of health which made her fierce for her food. She would have eaten crusts to ride bareback steeds rather than stay at home and live on cushions and French cookery. All she did was with such an air of head-strong will as to earn her a reputation for more vices than she possessed.

Once off, and they had not long to wait, the lads saw little more of her that day. Luck was against them for any close share in the day's proceedings. Getting to the

farther side of the Beacon they heard of an easy kill a mile below. Thence the hounds had been taken across the neck of the Randoggers to draw a coppice lying out on its north side. They followed hot-foot, but arrived late, and saw nothing save far off a field of red-coats making in the direction of Hiddenden: there was no over-taking them on that line: it was already two o'clock, long after the reasonable hour for luncheon.

Raymond's thoughts ran back to the robbery of the morning. "Now she's eating my sandwiches!" he grumbled; he had shared Tristram's, with the result that they both remained hungry as ogres.

Through all the wide rolling country before them was now no sign of the hunt, and but little likelihood of its return. Raymond prayed Providence to show him where lay the nearest inn. Tristram said a cottage would do: where there was a roof there was bread. They had a shilling between them.

Tristram's was the wish which found readiest fulfilment. They procured bread and cheese and well-water from an old deaf woman at a lonely cottage far from any broad beaten track. Since they had come now even beyond the Tramp's reckoning, they shouted down her ear to enquire in what part of the world they were. She named the places round and the distances: there seemed to be no name at all for the spot where they were then standing. At the mention of Mander's Hill a mile away, Tristram brightened and turned to his companion, "Then I know where we will go," said he. He named, as worth a visit, the caves which lay under shelter of that shaggy ridge. The chance of further adventure made them forget to think if they were tired, or of distance or of time.

For the food she had already supplied, and for the matches and candle they now asked for, the old woman

refused to take more than a few coppers. Tristram laid three more under the bucket by the well's mouth as they departed. "She will find them to-morrow," he said, "when she goes for her *pour boire,*" and was pleased to think of the little surprise that lay ahead for her.

They found their way to the caves with some difficulty; gruesome holes to enter. Raymond gave a groan: "This is where the murder was," said he. "Didn't you hear Mander's ghost?" The oracular darkness ahead, sounded like a blanketed drum, as their voices rang into the crannies and windings of the way. They passed in, leaving cold daylight behind them. Four hours elapsed before they again crossed that threshold. It was seven of the clock and a cloudy night, when the throat of the cave became filled with boyish laughter: Tristram was crying what idiots they had been. He stumbled out, and dropping exhausted to ground, cried: "Midnight!" Ray said: "Now for Mander's ghost to finish us!"

Up went Tristram's laugh, pealing once more. "And it was just round the corner all the time! Oh, my socks!" He held in his hand a bunch of unravelled worsted. Most ludicrous to them now seemed these ingenious threadings of the labyrinth. They had lost themselves, and despaired, and hoped, and hungered, and thirsted, all within twenty yards of the outer world. Only now after weary hours of vain searching did the truth dawn on them.

Tristram rolled helpless against Ray's shoulder: "Oh, my socks, my socks!" he cried again, and grew voiceless. The dark wood-slopes rang with the youth's merriment. But however they might laugh and laugh they were obliged to recognise at last that their situation was somewhat dismal. They began to realise, now that the adventure was over, how dog-tired they really were. They had but two coppers between them, and were

something like twelve miles from home. It was night; stars shone faintly through mist, and there was no moon. Black hummocks of ground waited to entrap their feet.

"Through Randogger it would only be eight," said Tristram; "if we could find the way we came, it would cut off all Hiddenden."

Raymond voted for the short cut. "Only save us," said he, "from getting lost again!"

"I'm all right," Tristram declared, "once we hit on the right track; then's it due west. I can do that by instinct: it's my bump of locality."

Randogger they came to after two miles of stumbling in rutty lanes.

"This looks like it," said Tristram, peering through a black hole in the boundaries, beside which only a ruined gate-post remained. "If the stars would show up, one could make quite sure. Hullo, here are two paths; right hand must mean west — come on!"

A hundred yards further, he toppled head-foremost into a gully down which the track unexpectedly descended. A miry bottom broke his fall, but did not altogether save him; he picked himself out, dazed and shaken. "Oh, I say!" he held his hand up to his forehead, "I've a bump of locality the size of a hen's egg here!" cried he.

Raymond helped him to his feet. They tramped stolidly along, holding arms. The Tramp carried a swimming head, and reckoned little of the way. An hour's heavy plodding seemed to bring them nowhere.

"It's the cave over again!" growled Raymond. "Whenever will we get home?"

"Oh, bother it!" sighed Tristram. "It's not home, it's bed, or a place to sit down, I want now! I'm walking without socks. Home's ten miles off by now, I guess;" he went on, "and we are going away from it; the very name makes me sick! That cave's haunted; Mander's

ghost hangs out in it; *Maunder* must be his real name. Now we've got to maunder up and down for ever more. You and I aren't real people any more; we are ghosts; we came out of that cave dead!"

His companion bade him "shut up."

"Better to know when you are dead," persisted the Tramp, "because then you don't expect anything, and won't be disappointed at not getting it. Even to meet the Devil now would be cheering. What's the time? Have you a match left?"

Raymond struck a light and discovered that it was nearer nine than eight.

The Tramp groaned. "Doesn't knowing the time make one hungry?" he remarked.

"Why did you ask, then?"

"Being hungry's not a bad thing if one wants to have something to think of. If you think about getting home, your heart goes into your boots; think of food, and it stops at your stomach, and that's only half-way. What are we walking into?"

It was a gate. "Well, that shows we are somewhere, at any rate!" was Tristram's comment. "We aren't so dead as I thought we were."

They were in fields; uncertain forms loomed ahead seeming to be farm-buildings. To the boys' great relief a faint light showed stationary between two large bulks of shade. These turned out to be ricks stranded lonely in the now bare field which had supplied their building. Wattles made an enclosure of the intervening space. There, over the light of a lantern, stooped a besmocked figure in an old beaver hat. Catching a glimpse of what was within, Raymond said, "Why, there's lambing going on; it's early!"

They halted to look in over the fence, and beheld distressed maternity. The man in the smock, intent on

humane service, was too much wrapped up in his employment to take notice of their approach. When Raymond called out, "Gaffer, will you tell us where we are? we are out of our reckonings," it seemed that for the second time that day he had put the question to one hard of hearing. The man made no start at a voice thus coming to him out of the darkness: he finished the matter in hand before enquiring in a soft high voice whither they were intending to go.

Raymond was naming the Alwyn district; Tristram, with the conviction of exhausted energies, broke in, and declared for "food and bed." Where they might be he cared not.

The three Alwyns were eight miles away, they heard.

"Where are we now?" asked Raymond; and was told "Hiddenden."

"Then we've come the round after all!" he declared, utterly vexed at their continued ill-luck.

Tristram said, "We've maundered!" as though the thing were Fate's, and had to be.

But concern for themselves came to be forgotten for a while; under their eyes a very common tragedy was taking place. The stricken ewe stretched herself ineffectively in a last effort to overcome destiny, and gave up the struggle. Her life went out in a few gasps; a meek, pathetic, almost human resignation seemed to come upon her at the moment of death. In the dark and chilly atmosphere sounded the feeble bleating of a newborn lamb.

The man in the smock showed an agitation in which something of resentment mingled; yet he spoke mildly. "The poor dam, the poor dam!" he muttered, smoothing down the thick fleece with his hand. "Three mortal hours of pain, and this for the end to it all."

Without moving to look round he addressed himself

to his hearers: "'Twas a sorry chance: the hounds come along by here to-day, and killed in the very paddock where a dozen of 'em were. Of course they were all about the place then, and the mischief was done. The other she'p were all right, but this one; aye, it was a case from the first; she lay panting and never moved till her turns took her.

Tristram had begun peering round to get a glimpse of the speaker's face. When presently the latter rose and, holding the lamb in one arm, stooped to take up his lantern, its rays fell strongly on his large horse-like features. The boy recognised his old childish horror.

"It's Daddy Wag-top!" he whispered.

The yeoman showed he had keen hearing. "Aye," he said, "I'm Daddy Wag-top; that's what they call me. Who may you be?"

The boys gave their names.

"Well," said he, "you'll not get home to-night, I reckon; come along wi' me." He added with a queer note of apology, "I ask you to be so good;" and started to show them the way. "You say you are hungry," he said presently over his shoulder; "I dunno' what may be in the house, but whatever it is you'll be quite welcome."

The path led through dark farm-buildings and a low door into the black opaqueness of an interior. They sounded their way along a passage, their host murmuring apologetically that the woman who did for him left for home at eight o'clock. The very mention of such an arrangement indicated a strange solitariness of habit.

When a light showed, they found themselves in a heavily beamed room, with tiled floor; a broad ingle seat, made comfortable with patchwork cushions, enclosed the hearth. Two dogs came out of the ashes and wagged a dubious welcome. The boys dropped like two stones.

"Put your feet up!" said their host.

Removing their boots they did so, and were thankful.

"Oh, I forgot; I'm all over mud!" said Tristram, and got up again.

Daddy Wag-top viewed him with a concerned eye. "You've had a fall?" said he. Opening a deep dresser, he drew out a clean smock. "Lie on that," was his advice.

"No, I'll put it on," said the boy, "if I may?" It swathed him to his ankles; within the sleeves his hands rambled helplessly till he had turned back six inches of wrist.

Raymond could not but laugh out loud at the sight he presented. "You look like a tramp in a snow-drift," said he, when the other had settled back on to his bench. Light and warmth restored their spirits.

Daddy Wag-top's first care was for the sock-lamb. Laying it in a basket by the hearth he fetched rum, and milk which he set to warm; a rude feeding-bottle was in waiting. "Young gentlemen," said he, "I ask your pardon; but accidents have to be attended to first."

They made apologies in return for disturbing his quiet.

"It's a pleasure," said he, "that don't often happen to me."

Pity caught Tristram by the throat: he looked at this solitary man from whom he had fled when a child. Now he seemed a creature dignified past the ordinary of mankind. The old beaver laid aside showed a high forehead seamed with care; a sort of perplexed thought had set its mark there. Ashamed of his panic of six years ago, the boy wished genuinely to make amends.

"You are awfully good to trouble about us," he declared half shyly. "Will you tell us your name?"

"My name?" said their host; "Bagstock — Benjamin Bagstock; but few use it: 'Wag-top' is like enough, and comes easier."

It was very true: the nickname did fit; but to the two lads he was Mr. Bagstock thenceforward. Behind his back, when preparations of the meal took him out of the chamber, Raymond thumped his fist down with the remark, "I tell you what, Tramp, that old boy's a by-ordinary good sort; he's a gentleman!"

The notion was aided by the sight they had of walls lined with books. While their host was bringing them their supper from the rear, Raymond got up and examined the titles.

"Hullo!" he sang out, "Classics! — Livy, Horace, Virgil, and no end to them! Here's one whose name I can't read; it's rubbed off. By Jove, though, they are dusty! He doesn't take them down often, I think. Here's Homer, too; and commentaries without end. Don't you feel small, Tramp?"

"I do, in this thing;" Tristram indicated the smock. "It seems a sort of pastoral doctor's gown; graduates wore them once, didn't they? — regular smocks — in Milton's day, I mean. 'For we were shepherds on the self-same hill,'" he quoted to support his contention; but the mere sound of English in verse caused Ray's mind to become unintelligent.

The farmer returned, and found that young gentleman still nosing his book-shelves with a puzzled air. The youth spoke respectfully: —

"Mr. Bagstock, you seem to be a scholar."

"Seem! is about all I can do," answered his host, setting down provender on the board. "They were my father's books before me; they're not mine. I can only sit and look at the outsides of them, or, now and then — now and then, for the sake of old memories, I take one in my hands. Young gentlemen, draw up chairs for yourselves" (he spoke from over a saucepan into which he was setting down eggs to boil); "you are welcome to

everything but the milk and the rum, which must go to the feeding-bottle. If you are for saying grace over such poor fare, let it be Latin: Latin was my father's language; I've lost the sound of it, but my ears would welcome it again. I beg you to begin." He left them to fetch in ale.

"Latin, eh?" quoth Raymond, with a wry face. "Benedictus! Benny Bagstock says my sentiments for me!" and with that by way of thanksgiving they fell to.

Their host had no need to apologise of poor fare to such appetites. The boys out of politeness to one thus almost forced into entertaining them, made a point of talking, in spite of weariness and the rage their mouths had for food and drink. It was evident that their coming was a welcome event in that lonely abode.

"Your father, Mr. Bagstock, will you tell us of him?" asked Tristram. "Was he a great scholar?"

"Nothing more than a country school-master," answered his host; "but a student, sir; he never called himself a scholard. Books were like flesh and blood to him. He used to say that to know Latin made one equal to men of birth. The Squire of the place where he lived thought so too: would have him over of an evening to see him, lent him books, and at his death left him a part of his library — what you see here." He waved his hand round the chamber with a dejected air.

"It was then I remember him," he went on. "A little money accompanied the bequest. We came here; my mother did the farming, did everything; I cannot remember her without something in her hand to do. My father, I fear, helped her but little: he was a wonderful man; at fifty he had the spirits of a boy at having found leisure to become a scholard. Aye, he used to sit here, where I do now, and burn rush-dips over the page (we didn't have candles in those days). Often he took me in

hand, making me read aloud to him. I learned things by heart too; he believed I should come at it better that way — get it into me 'living,' he used to say; but he died too soon. On his death-bed he was talking Latin. '*Timor mortis conturbat me,*' I remember him saying over and over, till the sound of it stuck in my head. The parson, when I repeated it to him, told me it meant 'fear of death.' He had a great work he was about, and thought to finish, though it was hardly begun; the 'Iliad' into Latin hexameters it was to be."

Farmer Bagstock named the scope of the work confidently, as though it had merely been a question of time to get such a thing ended. The conception was the achievement. It was clear to his mind that, had the thing been done, his father would have ranked by Homer for future generations.

Raymond enquired rashly, "Have you it: — what he did get finished?"

Bagstock spoke low. "None of it, sir, none. He took it into his hands just before he died, and never let go of it again. My mother thought it a sort of madness; she had it buried with him. It lies yonder in Hiddenden churchyard, six feet under the ground." He spoke tremendously, as though a matter of vast significance lay waiting there till the Last Trump should call it back to life.

"Strange, gentlemen, is it not? the unfinished things which lie waiting in dead minds till God needs them."

The boys could not but be impressed by so much conviction and the simple eloquence of his speech. This peasant-farmer, of crude knowledge and ridiculous exterior, inspired them with respect.

Tristram said, "Mr. Bagstock, how much Latin do you know?"

"To be honest," answered the farmer, "I should say

none. I have the sound of some, that is all; and even that grows less every day. Hear now!"

He spoke five lines of Virgil, the opening of the seventh book of the "Æneid," stumbled, and came to a standstill. Raymond prompted him. "Right, right!" he cried, his eye lighting up, and pieced on another four or five lines, till memory gave out. His tongue pitched in a sea of false quantities. Stopping abruptly he said, "Then you know Latin, sir?"

"I learn it," said Raymond with honesty, adding, "You have the books there, Mr. Bagstock; can't you refer to them when your memory breaks down?"

The farmer shook his head: "I can't find the places. What was that from, that I said just now?"

Raymond told him.

He reached down the book with excitement, and had the place found for him. He plunged, reading aloud with horrid sing-song intonation, which suddenly fell into false quantities and breaches of metre. Seeming to know something was amiss, he halted. "It was to there I learned," he explained. "I was seven years old when my father first put that into my mouth; it is many a day since most of it went away. I was only ten when he died."

The old fellow became so stirred by the returning recollection that the boys were almost ashamed to remain observers of his emotion. They had risen from the table, leaving a board fairly cleared. Tristram went across to look at the lamb, now quietly reposing in the glow from the hearth.

Bagstock recurred to his duties as host. "Young gentlemen," said he, "excuse me for one moment; to-night must be a feast!" He disappeared and came back bearing two dusty black bottles: he exhibited them with decent complaisance as containing stuff whose worth he was sure of.

"This," he said, "is Madeira, sent to my father by his Squire friend in the old days: a Christmas gift; three dozen they were once. 'Wine, wisdom, and women be three good things,' the Squire wrote when sending them. 'You've samples of two' — my father's book-learning, and my mother, he meant to say — 'now sample the third!' The three dozen came regularly every year so long as the Squire lived. My father left some half dozen still unopened when he died; they are as he left them. Ah, well! you wonder at me, but this is how it was: he would sit at his books, I by him, my mother over there knitting or mending. Supper over, out would come this wine. My father would take a glass and stand it by him: a bottle lasted him a week. Now and then, when he had taught me anything new, he would give me perhaps a quarter of a glass in water. I used to taste it, and think it strong stuff in those days. He would say — ah, I can't quote it now — some name to do with the Muses, and I would toss off the draught, and say my piece over again to him. Maybe, if I learned more, he might offer me a second; then my mother would say: 'Ben, it's time you were in bed!' Latinity was not in my poor mother's composition; how she escaped it, having had me, I can't say. So, you see, I used to taste wine as a reward for my new learning. Now, when learning is past me, I let it stand. But for the sake of that memory I've sat here on winter nights with books at my elbow and a bottle unopened at my side, and thought of him. You'll understand he was a wonderful man!"

The boys began to think so.

Bagstock drew out the corks, and filled three glasses.

"To-night," he said, "I come back to where I left off when a boy; I feel as if my father were in the room. Master Hannam, Master Gavney, I beg you: you have the books there — you may delight my ears once more. Things, as you read, perhaps I shall remember."

It was a strange situation: two boys without a particle of love for Latin, and only a compulsory acquaintance therewith, set down by an old man with no knowledge of its meaning, to spout to him extracts from the poets.

"Get hold of something we know!" suggested Tristram; and Raymond found a place to begin.

Now and then between them the boys knocked together a rough construe. Daddy Wag-top leaned over the table in a state of ecstatic happiness, and sipped nectar while the numbers rolled. The youths also took a taste of his wine, and exchanged shy glances. No doubt it had once been liquor fit for a lord, but its day had gone by while waiting in Bagstock's wine-bin. It seemed now to repent of a wasted and heady youth, in flavours that bore a fanciful resemblance to sack-cloth and ashes.

Its taste did not dim their host's enthusiasm for its history; he poured it down his gullet on trust, past a palate that told him nothing of its decay.

"A fine wine!" he cried, holding it up to the light; "my father used to say so; he was a good judge. Young gentlemen, I shall remember this night while I live, and thank you for it! Come; I fill up your glasses and my own; another bottle remains. Ah, now I recall the name; it comes back to me! Mnemosyne! he used to say: have I it right? Memory, the mother of song; strange that I should have forgotten it!" He struck his forehead. "To be sure! to be sure! I could say that now; I have not repeated it, since when?"

He broke forth once more into recitative: —

Ὡς ἔφατ' ἐυχόμενος· τοῦ δ' ἔκλυε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων.

he began, and came presently upon famous lines. He gave them with gesture, seeming to know their meaning.

"'Twas so my father used to bid me say it," he explained to his hearers.

Raymond said, "That's Greek."

"Greek!" Bagstock would scarcely believe his ears or his tongue: to have stumbled on such good fortune! "It's forty years ago," he cried, "I believed I had forgotten it. The one bit of Greek he ever taught me, and now not to know it from Latin! Mnemosyne!" — he uttered the name with an exalted air — "it came when her name returned to me!"

He emptied the glass and refilled it again. After that there was no holding him; classic stammerings broke from his tongue; old cells of memory opened under the influence of the fusty beverage as it mounted through impoverished blood to the hungry brain. So across the board Bacchus sat in pantaloon age, and tippled into a riotous flow of speech.

"Poor old chap!" murmured Ray, and seized the bottle. "You must help, Tramp; we shall be ill; but a little more, and he'll be dead!"

The charitable youths got the remainder of a bottle empty between them; under the table portions had to be spilled when loathing stomachs refused all further service. Old Wag-top had passed, then, beyond cognisance of the small things that went on round him. His voice took on a triumphant ring, till he discerned dimly before him two heads fairly dropping with fatigue.

"Ah, yes," he murmured, vague words of hospitality. "Tired of course; want your beds; I'll show you the way," and sat helpless.

Raymond replied, "If you are sure that we are not turning you out of yours; rather than that we'll lie down here."

His host declared there was a bed for them to share. They helped him to mount the stairs, and were pointed to a chamber roughly got ready. In his sober state, Daddy Wag-top must have had the hands of a house-

wife, to make such swift and quiet preparations for his guests.

In his break-down they felt quite tenderly grateful to the old fellow; they saw him into his room, set his candle in a place of safety, and shook his hands, bidding him good-night.

Feeling the cares of the establishment upon them they descended to lock up, a rather needless precaution, and to coax the sock-lamb to its last possible feed for the night. Their efforts made it querulous and wakeful; packing it warm they left the bottle by its side, hoping that if it grew hungry in the small hours, it would have sense to discover comfort for itself.

It was long after eleven o'clock when they crawled up again to the bed that awaited them.

"Oh, Lord! we've earned it!" cried Tristram, for prayer and thanksgiving, and dropped himself, smock and all, into the sheets. He and his companion lay like logs felled to earth until the next day's sun was abroad, and Bagstock himself, restored and in his right mind, came to rouse them to breakfast.

At parting they found it difficult to speak their own gratitude against his. The Tramp said, with final protestation of thanks, "May we come again, some day?" whereto their host replied, his face hungry with anticipation of such a pleasure, "'Twould make me young again if you did!"

One of them, at least, required no further invitation. So it was not the last time that Daddy Wag-top heard the Classics.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WATER-FINDER

READERS who remember Tristram's early inclinations will not imagine he was to be kept out of water, because its cool silver eye beckoned to him from the recesses of a guarded privacy. Even had there been other pools available, he had so often in Raymond's company been through the lodge gates and the other locked wickets of the Hill Alwyn domain, that he came at last to regard himself as a privileged trespasser, against whose comings and goings no barrier would oppose itself.

Therein he reckoned without MacAllister. That worthy had an eye on him, or, at least, on the many footmarks of him which he had come to recognise on cross-cuts over the estate. Nor did it escape his observation that elsewhere the youth was to be met in Haycraft's company, a circumstance in itself sufficient to make the bailiff regard him with suspicion. A busy popping up at Parson's Coppice in the late autumn had brought him to see from afar Tristram shouldering a gun at pheasants that flew over, out of the Hill Alwyn covers; and within an hour, red-handed from the business, having with him a brace of his own shooting, the boy had given him good-day in passing, as though being in league with a half-poaching old vagabond who drained a neighbour's preserve laid no weight whatever on his conscience.

The Tramp grew aware that one face at least made a surly response to his glances, and that tawny MacAllister was no friend to him. The man asked him curtly one day — had he a gun-license? and got for answer, a statement at how many hundred yards Tristram chose to think he could bring down a bird, the boy regarding his skill as a sportsman a proof of his right to practise the art. He gave instances.

"Whose birds?" the bailiff wanted to know, and was met by a cheeky enquiry, whether he thought he had hatched them himself, and whether in that case, he was prepared to recognise them again by a squint in the left eye.

Such bandying of words, left the makings of a very pretty quarrel between the two. MacAllister coming in the following summer upon Tristram just up from bathing in one of the ponds, gave him curt warning to keep away unless he could come as a key-holder.

Tristram said, as if to ask was to receive, that he would write to Lady Petwyn for the privilege. MacAllister retorted that the matter rested with him, his eyes showing a clear negative. Orders against trespassing were repeated and with emphasis. On that Tristram promised that if Lady Petwyn would state a complaint against him, he would never again set foot on her acres. His tone inferred that he judged MacAllister officious, a Jack-in-office, and a boaster of more power than he wielded. On their parting, it was quite evident that the boy intended to disobey.

His enemy kept watch for him around the ponds, reckoning on what would be the likeliest hours for catching him. Two days later he beheld his quarry bobbing like a dab-chick midway between bank and island. A short search under the trees brought the bailiff on a deposit of raiment; in a twinkling he beheld his advan-

tage, and with true Celtic rapacity seized it to the uttermost. MacAllister, that is to say, was not content with holding ground which would have enabled him to administer a sharp wigging under conditions humiliating to the culprit immediately on his landing, but must remove the whole pile to a depth of thicket hard by the boat-house, whence he could survey unseen the approaching discomfiture of our hero.

Tristram had swum round the island and out of sight up to the far end of the pond; landing there he had raced back through the wood to the spot where his cast-off garments should have been lying. Behold them vanished! MacAllister's heavy trail did not tend to concealment: the situation became clear to the culprit's understanding.

A very little stalking was needed to show him the whereabouts of his enemy. The red-headed bully was to be seen glaring steadfastly out over the water in expectation of the swimmer's return; under him lay the bundle of clothes safely sat on.

The sight produced retrograde movement: it was not the modesty of the flesh which persuaded the boy to retreat, but the knowledge that, MacAllister having planned one thing, it was his bounden duty to plan another. Beholding MacAllister at watch like a spider for his fly, the Tramp determined that to catch the one he was after he should be driven into becoming a water-spider. "How can I make him come for me?" he cogitated, and was quick at devising a way.

"Query," he said to himself, "can the beast swim? In any case, will he?" thought he; and settled to doubt it.

MacAllister's peerings had become rather anxious; the bather was remaining a long time at the head of the lake. Possibly the Tramp had only to lie hidden close by, and curiosity would move the other to a quest up the banks, leaving the spoil behind him. Possibly, again, not;

he might smell a rat; there was danger in delay. Tristram crept back to the nearest point whence unobserved he could slip down into the water. Could he act well enough? he wondered.

Presently MacAllister had the joy of beholding his unsuspicious prey swimming slowly towards him. He swam low down in the water, coming along by the further shore. Thence he skirted, till passing the boat-house, and from there struck out straight for his landing-point.

The bailiff now had him well under his eye, a pleasant morsel to contemplate; all the virtuous spider in him spread out its claws for the bait.

All at once he was concerned to notice that the poor water-fly was in difficulties; his mouth ducking up and down in the water, gasped and blew bubbles; his strokes were feeble and spasmodic, making no way at all; exhaustion wrote itself over this swimmer's efforts to keep afloat. He gathered himself for a final struggle, got his mouth free, put out a faint cry for help, threw up his arms, and went down like a stone.

MacAllister knew little about aquatics, had never seen a man drown, and could not swim. He raced headlong to the boat-house, lost time fumbling to unhasp the door, but with commendable expedition got the punt unchained, and thrust out hurry-skurry to the rescue.

Not only could he not swim, he could not even punt with any efficiency; under his manipulation the craft zigzagged and swung round and about, making heads and tails of his humane efforts at life-saving.

Half by blundering force, half by luck, he got it at last over the spot where the boy's body had disappeared. He probed desperately in all directions, bringing up yards of black slime on the end of his pole; but no limpet claim to existence ever attached weight to the end of it.

To a watcher from the banks it might have been a

laughable, yet also a piteous sight — the red man, strong, perspiring, angry and helpless, wondering in himself when it would be decent to throw up a profitless quest, and go off to bid dredges be fetched for the body of the silly, hapless youth, whose trespassings had proved his undoing. When at last he landed, dispirited and aching from the exertion to which he had been driven, great at first was his astonishment, thereafter his perplexity, and last of all his rage, to discover that not the bather alone, but his clothes also, had vanished.

No report of a drowned body waiting to be fished out was carried back by him to Hill Alwyn.

Tristram's wits were thenceforth maliciously at work to circumvent a declared enmity. He heard that MacAllister walked down to the ponds, whip in hand, daily. Not to show himself now, under such a challenge, was to appear craven. Had Raymond been at home, the Tramp could have gone in with impunity, the keys being a recognised passport to all the wilderness portion of the demesne. But it was important to his pride that he should make an appearance without delay; then, if he was to be finally warned off, let Lady Petwyn express the wish, and her grounds should be rid of him.

One morning he ran down to Little Alwyn, and came back primed for the project. He undressed in a tree that sent long boughs far out into the water. Though he conceived that a bolt for home under cover of dusk, in an unconventional state of grace might be amusing, clothes, after all, were necessary to him for the sake of argument; and to have his garments returned to him the next day with Lady Petwyn's or the MacAllister's compliments, was not a solution that fitted with his notions of a successful raid.

Therefore, selecting his tree carefully, as one which older limbs would not care to climb, he bound his raiment

to a high fork, and dropped from branch to branch till he touched water.

He returned well-spent, half-an-hour later, to behold MacAllister puzzling in various directions to find the whereabouts of his clothes. He had not yet looked high enough.

He sighted the bather a moment before his landing, and came on well-assured of his prey.

"Good-morning!" cried Tristram, and swung up on to his bough.

The bailiff watched him climb with grim satisfaction, thinking it a temporising expedient for escaping capture.

"It's no use, my young gentleman!" he called; "you may just as well come down."

"Oh, but I dress up here!" replied Tristram, and proceeded to unpack his bundle. "Clothes," he explained, "have a habit of running about if one leaves them; so I tie them up here in a tree-top cradle, as if they were babies. Have you any babies, Mr. MacAllister?"

MacAllister was married to a wife who had proved imperfect in her duties to the clan; the family tree had put forth no branch. If rumour uttered no slander, elsewhere compensating appearances had been noted. To be asked by the whipper-snapper he was about to thrash, whether he had babies, whitened the already red-hot rage which burned in the big man's choleric body.

"What I do with babies when I get 'em," he sent up word, "you shall know when you come down!"

"Dear me! shall I?" said Tristram, and drew on a sock with fastidious attention to its fit.

"You will!" the other reiterated; and let it be seen how, flicking his whip.

"Are you violent to them?" the boy asked.

"I treat 'em how they deserve!"

"But if you do that, Mr. MacAllister, you will never, never rear them! Think of their poor mothers!"

The bailiff swallowed down his wrath, reckoning that a little more waiting would right the balance between them. In carrying on a wordy conflict from below he stood like an unhorsed rider at a tourney. Every insolence wherewith Tristram chose to probe him, sounded to advantage from the lofty position he then held.

"I'll think of your poor mother when you show her your back to-night!" said he, in a voice that strove to be assured and calm in its promises.

The Tramp was all but dressed, when by mischance down went one of his boots. His foe forebore to take note of so small a windfall; expecting so much more he let it lie.

Tristram began to descend from his bower; arrived at one of the lower branches he said, "Mr. MacAllister, would you throw me up my boot?"

The bailiff nodded him on with a resolute jerk of the chin. "You may just as well come now as ever," said he, and stood ready to pounce on the moment of the boy's descent.

Tristram studied him as though for the first time getting a near view of some strange animal.

"Mr. MacAllister," he said, "you look quite violent."

"You'll see me looking a little more violent presently," was the answer.

The Tramp doubted if that were possible. "And you won't give me up my boot?" he asked, straddling the bough he was on.

He was told he must come down for it.

"But this is my boot-tree!" he said, for the first absurdity that came handy.

"And this is mine!" broke out MacAllister, brandishing.

Affecting an extremity of surprise, Tristram enquired, "Mr. MacAllister, are you proposing to beat me?" and got the "I am!" of an unalterable determination.

Wishing to know what for, he was bidden to remember he had had many warnings. Compound trespass was now to bring in compound interest.

"Oh, but I'm not trespassing!" said Tristram, "I'm visiting at the Vicarage," and produced the keys which he had obtained that morning on loan from Mr. Hannam.

The bailiff took the intended blow without the stir of a muscle.

"You weren't visiting there yesterday," said he, "and you won't be visiting there to-morrow. What I've got to say to you will be for t'other time instead of for this. I mean it, and I'll do it, and I'll face the consequences. You may come down for it when you like."

Here then was a new fact beyond the Tramp's reckoning: he had fairly miscalculated the man he had to deal with; but he had gone too far with his tongue to retreat now.

"Mr. MacAllister," he addressed his enemy in wheedling tones, "do you always mean what you say?"

"This time, anyway, my young master, as you'll find!" the bailiff replied.

"And do you always mean what you *do?*"

"You may say yes to that."

"When you make a punt go round and round on itself, for instance, are you beating the punt, or is the punt beating you?"

For the moment the bailiff contained his temper. "Talk away! young gentleman," said he, "you'll be answered presently."

Tristram said with an emotional stress that threw ridicule on the words; "Mr. MacAllister, you tried to save my life then! Will you save it again?"

The boy smiled with meaning, and beheld a visage suddenly inflamed: at last he had got MacAllister up to storming pitch. The big man dashed about under the boughs and flourished his whip; words inarticulate with wrath flew from him. Tristram stood up on his branch.

"Here, catch!" he cried, all at once, and cast the remaining boot.

MacAllister saw too late his line of escape, and was helpless. The boy ran like a squirrel along the bough, out over the water, dropped to a lower, and plunged, carrying leaves and twigs with him. When he rose he was far out in the open.

"Oh, Mr. MacAllister!" he cried, "come and save me, come and save me!" All the woods round rang with his laughter.

He was out upon the other side long before the bailiff could get round either end of the long pond to be after him. To run home bare-footed was nothing to him. It was true MacAllister had his boots: on the whole, considering the return "rise" got out of him, he was welcome to the trophy.

Tristram meeting Lizzie Haycraft the day after, told her of the affair with glee; and detected in her eyes, during the recital, an extreme hatred of MacAllister's name. So bitter was it she could not rightly take in the laughable aspect of the thing; that MacAllister was the subject spoiled everything; she would not say why.

They were on their way up to the Beacon Farm, where water-scarcity on high ground and an easily drained soil had cropped up in an aggravated form. The dry season had made the only well on the premises unusable; nothing but mud came up from it. Men were being employed at all hours of the day in carting water up to the farm.

Under such conditions, with no rain fallen for over a

fortnight, a single spark carried in their direction might mean doom for the farmer's ricks. There could be no remedy if a conflagration once started.

After borings had been tried for over a week without success, the farmer, nervously anxious over his haystacks, was reverting to an old-world expedient, having bidden a reputed dowser come over from the neighbouring district and try his hand at divination.

The Tramp, hearing of it from Lizzie, went over with her to see the operation in process.

The water-wizard was not up to the time appointed; he arrived a full hour late. It was apparent that the drink which had sustained him by the way had not come from wells. Out of his own village he became a great man, and accepted freely, when offered, a great man's privileges: to sit in an inn parlour and brag of his mysterious powers, meant the filling of it to the profit of the landlord; thus drink came cheap to him. To-day, it had made him unpunctual to his appointment.

Farmer Duffin, seeing his state, guessed him an unprofitable servant for the occasion, and swore downright, that only for the job done should he receive a farthing of his fee. That was the bargain, true enough; but travelling expenses were to be in any case. The dowser, feeling prejudice at work against him, and reckoning his employer likely to prove close-fisted were he to fail, stipulated for his return fare to be first paid him; he named an amount. Thereat, the claim being impudently large, the farmer raised protest.

"That's what it's took 'e to swim here!" quoth he. "I don't pay for the liquor."

"Thee do!" said the dowser; "'twas to be *and* liquor." So, he pointed out, ran the terms of agreement that had brought him.

"Right ye be!" quoth the big farmer; "on the

job, that meant. Y'aren't on it yet, ye great lousing swindle!"

So accosted, the man left off preparation of the mystic twig wherewith the search was to be conducted, and waggled unsteadily to his feet with intentions at dignity. He didn't come over forty miles on a hot day to oblige a client, he gave the farmer to understand, only to hear himself called names at the other end and be grudged the price of a drink on the way. Did he think a water-finder went for it with his tongue out like a dog — the thirstier, the more likely he to come on it?

"Be easy!" quoth the farmer; "ye be one who wouldn't know water if he saw it!"

"Ye mean I doan't know me business, then?" said the insulted wizard.

"I mean, ye don't let it touch your in'ards, nor your out'ards more than ye can help! I mean, ye be come here so gone in liquor as you'd strike on the sock tank and call it a well — and be for having me pay 'e for the lie! You be a bucket without a bottom, you be!" continued the farmer; "a poor, helpless, hickory-dickory, dry pump of a thing, for all the water we shall ever get out of 'e. Show me ever a well 'at's been made on your recommendation, and I'll go and drown meself in it!"

Whether or no the dowser had, for all his fuddled condition, been spying the land and reckoning what small chances it offered of credit to his powers, certain it is he made no struggle to secure the larger fee which a successful operation would have won him; he haggled over sixpences, demanding to be sent back again not out of pocket by his excursion.

The farmer rigorously put down the third-class return fare to the place he had come from, with a shilling over, and forthwith turned his back on him. As the fellow still sat cursing and demanding heavier dues, he returned pres-

ently to say, that if, five minutes from that time, he found a sham dowser on his premises, he would have him ducked in his element.

"There's just enough to do it left in the water-butt," quoth the farmer; "and if there warn't I'd have it carted up for the occasion."

So threatened, and feeling himself in a poor minority, the man picked up the ill-earned parings of his commission, spat, and went off to drink his way back to the place that knew him.

After he had gone, rustics stood handling the twig he had left behind him. "This is the way 'tis done!" quoth one, and showed them how. Many tried their hands, but manifested no grasp of the magic properties. Farmer Duffin looked on in dejection, regretting a wasted morning. The field all about the farmstead was dotted with borings as though some great mole had been there at work.

Tristram roamed the premises, casting a judicial eye this way and that for any tokens that might be a guide for fresh experiment. He returned at last, and pointing to a tree that stood over on the far side of the foredraft which led up to the farm, "There ought to be water there," said he. "Notice how the roots go, and the boughs; they haven't the curve of those others; there's pull at work somewhere."

The farmer shook his head incredulously as a man who had heard a tale told too often. "It ain't a bit of use, Muster Tristram," said he. "We've tried all likely places; I reckon there be no water left on the land since the old spring be run dry."

Tristram took up the divining rod. He had read how the thing was done, and the little knowledge gave him quite a professional air. Taking off his boots, which were thick and had nails in them, he started on a methodical

course up and down the well-explored field. The rod held out by its two prongs before him stayed quite unresponsive, but already the mummery of the thing pleased him; it fitted in with things he had done when a child to avert the evil chance; and as he followed the ritual, an underlying belief in its truth began to take hold of him. He bent his head intent on the character of the ground under his feet, and watching the rod for an indication he was half ready to expect. He forgot where he was. Presently he felt shadow: his foot struck on to tree-root under grass. He halted and threw back his head quickly to see boughs, and just before him the bole of the tree to which he had first pointed. As he did so, up swung the twig. On the hazard he accepted the omen, and cried "Water!"

Mr. Beresford Gavney, taking his wife for an evening drive in the lanes threading the outskirts of Randogger, came suddenly on a shocking sight. A party of labourers, emerging from a field-path on to the public way, revealed to him on nearer view one of themselves as his own son, Tristram.

The lad was miry, daubed over with red clay from head to foot, and in extraordinary spirits. The sight of his parents puzzling their eyes to recognise him did not abash him in the very least. He ran forward and mounted the low foot-board of the carriage, crying: —

"Mother, mother, only think! I've found water. I have! Up at Beacon Farm. Old Duffin says it's worth a hundred pounds to him. And it runs like the Nile; looks as if it were going to be the biggest river in England!"

"Really, my dear Tristram, you alarm me!" said Mrs. Gavney, hearing of so large a thing as so near a neighbour. "Is it safe for you to do such things?"

His father in cold tones bade him get off the carriage. "If you must get yourself into that state, keep your distance. You are too dirty to be seen. A pity you can

never be given liberty without forgetting that you are a gentleman."

Tristram in haste to make them realise the situation, passed over the reproof. "Yes, but I found water," said he. "Duffin wanted to give me a horse; but I thought you wouldn't like it, so I said no."

There was a note of interrogation in his voice, as he gave the information, but it drew no concession: he had been quite right, of course, to say no to any such suggestion. The carriage moved on, leaving him alone in his glory; but that was sufficient to keep him satisfied in the face of any slight rebuffs. To appreciate the honourable mire his clothes bore on them, it was necessary to have seen the rush of water that had followed the first boring. He had done so; and had heard stout yokels applauding with honest delight. The taste of the Beacon Farm cider was still sweet on his palate; but, somehow, sweeter still was the red stained water which, with a stroke like that of Moses, he had fetched forth out of the dry earth. Henceforth it seemed to him that his name must belong to Beacon Hill, and he be a part of it along with that welling spring, that veritable river, which he had conjured forth to the service of man and beast.

Farmer Duffin had proved the value of his service by the offer willingly made, even pressed, and by him reluctantly declined. Tristram had the generosity which hates to refuse a gift that is cordially intended; but he hardly remembered his regret in the almost passionate pleasure of the day's fortune. His sleep that night was fevered by dreams of it, and contrary to habit he awoke to find night scarcely half over.

It was one or two in the morning. Not merely awakened, but wakeful, he wanted to stir and be doing. For a while he tossed, feeling the unreasonableness of the impulse, but at last rose, and pushing his head under the blind, looked out on to the night.

All was still and wonderful; not asleep, but under a mask; conscious, mute but alert. Over every familiar form a hand without fingers, a mitten of darkness, seemed to have closed. Shapes that showed out hard in the day made mysterious blottings, rising out of a deep pool of impenetrable shade. He saw the stables, the out-houses, the fowl-paddock, herded and gregarious under that dim air; a net of mystery and restraint spread over them; while the trees stood aware of night, these others lay dormant. The boy's heart beat. Instinctively his lungs drew in a deep breath; it seemed, then, that his body became infected with the spirit of night.

The wind said so little, he could hear each separate thing that moved under space: the house-dog turning in its kennel, the rub of the carriage-horse against its stall, the shuffle in the fowl-house of a hen upon its roost, the asthmatic breathing of a sheep in the field on the opposite slope, the cry echoed from the woods where some night-bird had seized on its prey, the awakening of water-fowl at the ponds. But of inanimate things only the garden stirred audibly; not a field through all its trees and hedges seemed to send forth a breath.

From far away, suddenly, struck one point of sound, and all the world grew wide. The boy's spirit seemed to reach out across space, crying, "I, too, am awake!"

Yonder on the turnpike road, toward Randogger's dark-roofed solitudes, under three miles of night emptied of human-kind, he heard the going of a horse. All earth, muffled and mute environed him; but there, there (how much of romance did not the fever of the road mingle with the thought of it in his blood!), there, like an anvil, was the ring of the iron way, and there alone, amid the thousand populous silences of night, adventured feet bound to some unknown goal.

The sound struck down and died in a fold of the hill;

after, came faintly the click of heels cresting a more distant rise. Once over the brow, it passed not to return. Night shook off its traveller and resumed the vague burden of its huge quietude. Yet not for long without indication of an approaching change; from the hen-house came the discord of the first cock-crow. Sound of it went to the gardener's poultry at the lodge; thence was carried to the Hill Alwyn farms, and stirred the hen-roosts of the village; till fainter and fainter borne, cock-crow outreaching cock-crow, it touched the borders of Randogger, a landmark which returned no sound. Whence came it when silence once more settled, that, without lifting a shade, darkness recognised that another of its hours was flown? Only as an after-thought then did the clocks of Bembridge toll two.

To the listener at night, sound is ever more suggestive than by day. Replacing in a measure intimations we are accustomed to receive through the eye alone, it finds us in a more apprehensive mood, and stimulates the mind to discover all the meanings that it has to convey. The rumours that rise from the dark hush of night-bound earth map out audibly to the brain the whereabouts and traces of sleeping humanity through tracts invisible under shade. And at once, by some affinity left over from a wilder state, we seem to have joined the fox stealthily on its rounds through the hen-roosts of the district, and to hear, at how great a distance, the nearest watch-dog beginning to give the alarm. So little commotion of the blood is needed for all the rover within us to be awake.

The heart still stands for the unknown part of man; it invents for itself worlds out of quite prosaic elements, and knows not why. Wills it so; nay, rather, is seized by the inspiration, as the priestess when she feeds on the gaseous fumes of the oracle; and the result is straightway beyond its power of control. Some name it the divine

voice. Youth, at least, unconscious of the source, recognises when it has heard the inevitable call.

From that moment a new vagabondage took hold of the Tramp's heart. It was to him like the discovery of a new dimension. He saw night then as for the first time: sleepless night lifting a conscious eye. To him, sleepless, she beckoned: the hour of initiation was here and now, his window the door out into her world. Quickly he dressed, slid down by the water pipe to the lean-to below, and was out to the fields. His feet were tasting the deep and wonderful dampness of the crops; his heart was drawing him on to follow the sound that had beckoned from the woody ridge below Beacon Farm. So, before long he came where thick coppice circled the upland he sought, high on whose crest heart and foot now longed to be.

In the shivering and uprising twilight he mounted the hill-side, the goal of his fantastic quest; turned to look back, and saw the woods black below him still; stooped and drank, and heard in the tree overhead, sharp as a blade, the cry of the first awakened bird; looked up, and saw at the farm the yellow gleam of blinds behind which labour arose to its work.

On the way home he passed Haycraft's solitary abode. Father and daughter were already up; and the bread he shared with them seemed the sweetest he had ever tasted.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

IT was said of an ill-constitutioned monarch that nothing in his life became him so well as his manner of quitting it. Certainly by that retirement he accomplished more to his purpose than by all the egregious acts of his reign. Picturesquely he stands out in history, not altogether a failure; going down to his house justified, if to live long in men's minds be a thing worthy to die for.

Of Tristram Gavney's school-life also some would hold that nothing in it became him better than the last wild act which brought down the curtain. That would have been the verdict of his school-fellows. So high a picture did he leave of himself in that final flourish, that even adverse critics were fain to admit he had carried the folly through in a gallant style. Thereafter his name stood in tradition along with one mad episode little relished of the authorities, but lifting him high in the eyes of his contemporaries.

At the end of the autumn vacation, when the school met, rumour went round that an old commemorative tradition of Friars-gate was about to perish, and that the half-holidays of the mid-term were to lose that peculiar jollity which had marked their recurring place in the school-calendar. There was to be no November bonfire. Big schools were letting the celebration go; little schools were in a hurry to follow.

Next to paper-chasing nothing was so accordant with Tristram's mind as those log-rolling jaunts to Randogger and the outlying farmsteads, which had been the game twice a week for a whole month preceding the day of conflagration. In these expeditions the Tramp had figured well; he knew the locality and was known and liked at the farms. Also he loved the hard manual labour of hauling and hoisting the odd scraps of timber which were given them. Often the formula was, when some big decayed log was in request — for the boys were arrant beggars — "Aye, you may take it if you can carry it." And Tristram, returning once with a picked body and a strong small-wheeled trolley, had succeeded in carrying off a mighty weight abandoned a few days before, which had been offered to a party of them on such terms. The farmer who had been chaffing them, meaning no such gift, beheld a pound's worth of good timber gone on the strength of his rash word. He wagged his head and bore his loss sportsmanlike, only saying, "You'll find me stingier come twelvemonth." Tristram had promised to test him.

Now, it seemed, these honest marauding expeditions were to be over, and even the great blowing woodland of Randogger to which a day's permit had always been available was to remain unrifled of its dead wood; and the pity was that high gales were abroad promising a rich harvest.

All Friars-gate growled, and wondered how most effectively to show its sulks. Some suggested that deprived of their trolleyings they should be resolutely slack and do nothing, neither at football nor in the chase.

"Rot!" said Tristram, and preserved a cheerful countenance, perceiving with his histrionic faculty awake, that there might be glory ahead for the down-trodden Doormats. He held conference with a few leading spirits, and

at the end of it briefly announced that the Attics might do as they pleased, but so far as the Dormers were concerned, the bonfire was still to be.

It so happened that quite early in the term, the Door-mats were made to feel their outside standing in a matter which touched their honour more than their inclinations; and thereafter the prospect of their coming vantage was the more sweet to them. An upper school-boarder detected in villainous bullying was to receive public chastisement, and for the preliminary call-over the whole school trooped in obedient to bell-summons. At the end of the recitation, the Door-mats were informed that they might retire beyond the threshold, Dr. Coney holding this to be a boarding-house matter of no concern to the town element.

The slight was felt, and the unfairness, for the big culprit had bullied not boarders only. Shipton minor bore bruises, and had a vindictive wish to see himself avenged. Climbing up by two tiers of backs, he got an eye to a lower window-pane and made report of what went on within. Down below, an open-air indignation meeting mouthed for a while; but on the signal of commencement, windy talk about not going into the next call-over died down. When the swishing started, the outsiders found that their position was not without its attraction. Shipton up aloft, reported merrily his bird's-eye view of the proceedings.

"Treacles has him!" word came down. "All right; wait now! One, two, three; can you fellows hear it? Oh yes, I'm counting. Seven, eight, nine. What? — only nine; and I've had twenty from the brute myself! Oh! the Beak's jawing a moral in between; it's to be sandwiched. Stop! — four more. That's something like! Treacles lets him down; he don't seem to know which leg to stand on. He won't sleep on his back to-night, I

bet, — the beast! Hullo! the Beak's looking; he'll not recognise such a bit of me though. Let me down!"

Little Shipton slithered to ground with a countenance of beatific contentment.

Yes, exclusion had its charms; but for all that the injustice was remembered. It was the old question of prestige; though the word lay outside a school-boy's vocabulary, its essence was understood. Tristram determined that before the term was old the Door-mats' horn should be exalted with honour, and their light set shining before men in a fashion not to be blinked at. Before a week was over he had thirty of them itching to follow his lead.

Thus it came about that for a whole month no Door-mats were to be got to the half-holiday "pick-ups." Even the first paper-chase of term failed to attract them. There was no secret about what they were up to. Coming that day upon the trail of the hares in the outskirts of Bembridge they waited the arrival of the hounds, and raised cheers of rivalry. "Go it, Bed-brats!" they cried, and charged into their midst with a trolley loaded gloriously with fuel for the Fifth.

They tossed off their caps defiantly to any master they passed. Doctor Coney himself one day met the procession rattling down High Street. "I say, you beggars," cried Tristram, after they had all solemnly saluted, "mind you know your swot! The Beak has got liver in his eye, and he'll be on you to-morrow."

They rose to his leading. Their effrontery clothed itself in virtue, and rendered them immune from detention. Outrageous industry and propriety of deportment made them an offence to their school-fellows. Door-mats came out top of each class week by week through sheer excess of naughtiness directed into new channels The thing could not have lasted; one or two of them showed signs of overtraining before the day came.

Doctor Coney, wishing to know the chosen whereabouts for their proposed flare up of independence, made secret enquiry through one of his under-officials, known to the school as the grass-widower. The plotters were playing a deep game: nothing could be learned except that they had secured storage in an old cart-shed near the school. No bonfire was building. Aware, now, that protest was their intention, the Doctor suspected that they had some wild notion of introducing fuel into the school-field on the night itself, and there kindling the blaze. Against that it might be necessary, when the day came, to set Treacles and the grass-widower on extra duty as bound-beaters. For the rest, forewarned being forearmed, he thought that he might sleep secure. Nevertheless he deemed it fair, at the last moment, to give a word of warning to the evident ringleader.

"You will understand, Gavney," he said, "that new rules are made to be kept. My authority here is not to be defied. How you may choose to waste your leisure outside is another matter. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Tristram, "I quite understand that." He waited with deference for anything more to be said, and received his short dismissal with a demure aspect.

November's Fifth fell on a Saturday. In the afternoon the day-boys came on to the foot-ball field with looks of overbearing importance; they showed pockets which bulged with chrysalis explosives.

"Where is it going to be?" asked boarders, hungry with curiosity, and received winks to stimulate intelligence. Yet when seven o'clock sounded for lock-up, sending the lower school into hall, and the upper into studies, there was no sign of the promised bonfire. The grass-widower, parading the lower field with a yoke of buckets, began to feel foolish. Treacles was for reporting the evident break-down of the conspiracy.

Quite suddenly, to the other side of the school buildings, on the higher ground of Hartop's grazing land, a light broke, and revealed the audacious whereabouts of the whole business. The field in question jutted like a squared elbow into a rear angle of the Friars-gate acres; half the windows of the school looked out on it. Treacles said, "They've got Hartop's and there's naught to be done. Come you on!" and went to report to Doctor Coney the evasion of his jurisdiction.

Disconsolate boarders, sitting mewed up in their studies, saw, too, the triumph of the despised Door-mats. Gaping flames leered at them across their boundaries, and wagged derision of their tame surrender to outrageous authority. Presently, it was not only the fire getting to work at its big meal which raised rebel feelings, there was also a merry pyrotechnic display going on; shooting rockets dropped their sticks over the playground wall; dark figures ran and gesticulated against the glare, familiar to the envious eyes that watched. The revellers made much more noise than their numbers warranted, bent as they were on throwing word to attendant ears of the full jollity that possessed them. It became more at last than some flesh and blood could stand.

Before long, ground-floor study-windows lay ajar; heads popped up over the top of the playground wall for a nearer view. Their owners received a cordial invitation to come over; and offers of fair barter in the matter of squibs and crackers completed the seduction. Over a dozen bold spirits leapt out of bounds to join in the revelry, trusting to darkness, a posting of sentries, luck and fleetness of foot, for the avoidance of detection and capture. The playground was broad and had a high wall; the two offering to calculating eyes a sufficient interposition in the way of approaching danger.

The new-comers were in time to see the crowning

glory of the show; a trussed figure treveted on three poles, was borne forward, and set to swing across the flames. The fiery element, like an hungry fledgling on its nest, threw up its beak peckishly to snatch at the impending worm. "Treacles" figured in black on a white label, stuck into the effigy's head-gear; a choleric red-face dripped wax to the flames below. When the straw in the stuffed legs caught fire, it was time for the spectators to back to a respectful distance; up higher lay the keg of villainous saltpetre containing dissolution for the poor object of their ridicule.

The boom of the explosion when it broke, adding to the report carried in to him by his myrmidons, brought up Doctor Coney to take a far view of the scene. Going for a more commanding view from an upper window, he looked, in passing, into one of the studies, and found it empty. A few minutes later the school-bell rang, and gave a momentary hitch to the consciences of a few bound-breakers.

"What? Then it must be half-past eight already!" exclaimed one, "and we've got to get back before nine!" Time of course passed quickly; the explanation gave them the hour without the trouble of consulting their watches, and freed them from qualm about what for the moment had seemed to be an unfamiliar bell. So the sport danced on, nimble-legged, beyond the high-wall boundary. There was no denying that the Door-mats had scored their point; it seemed better to make the admission frankly, and go in for a share in the feast.

Round and round flew the fire-worshippers in a glitter of powdered flame. Catherine wheels span; Roman candles spat gobbets of light; underfoot crackers leapt like fiery grasshoppers across the ground; overhead lordly rockets ran up like corn-stems of fire, and shed coloured grain to the stars. All round, the field ran away velvety

in shadow to the final swallowing-up and darkness of night.

Riot was still high when the small figure of Tabbin minor sprung in on the company.

"Oh, I say, won't you fellows just catch it!" he cried, addressing the bound-breakers. "There's been a call-over; word came round to the studies; and fifteen names have gone up as absent. Treacles has been all round and locked the outers, and the penny-slide's been fastened. I came over by the pigeon-houses. I'm off back again; it's no use your hurrying, you're all caught. Oh! Chubby, the fat'll be in the fire to-morrow!" He smacked his hand cheerily over the pillowy form of a large fellow from the lower-fourth, and scuttled out of sight.

The out-bounders formed a depressed group. "What shall you say?" one queried.

"Say? Oh, say that I was nowhere, and didn't hear the word. How was I to know it was a call-over, thought it was the kid's bed-bell."

"That won't do! Treacles went everywhere, you bet. Your tale won't wash!"

"Then it must pig it; that's all!"

They let off their last remaining squibs in each other's faces, and seemed valiant to meet their fate. But the heart was gone from the game. The Door-mats were giving themselves superior airs of freedom; they had stuck their light under no bushel but on a candlestick; if moths came singeing their wings that was their own look-out.

The out-bounders began to slink away; conscious that they stood detected though no eye of authority had lighted on them, they felt now that to stay longer might involve them in deeper damnation. The event proved them wise.

"Cave! Cave!" was sung up from the corner of the field. "Now then, you Bed-brats, look alive! Here's the Beak coming."

The word was hardly out when darkness swept them up from the glare of the flames. The Door-mats rubbed in their triumph; shouting with unenslaved lungs, their song could be heard even up at the dormitories, to which the small boys of the lower forms had now mounted.

"We won't go home till morning!" rang out defiantly above the crackling of the flames.

Tristram led. Authority was over-stepping its limits and coming to overawe them; their point was to make a full parade of a good conscience.

"Gavney!" said the voice they were all expecting.

Tristram came respectfully to attention, with cap off.

"Here, sir!" said he.

"Oblige me by putting an end to this orgie. Every one of you go to your homes."

Tristram stood his ground. "But we've hired the field, sir!"

"You will do as I say, sir!" said the Beak, with asperity.

"But, sir, we've all done our preparation. We've a right to do as we like now."

"There, Gavney, we differ. Enough that I now tell you to go."

"No, sir," retorted Tristram; "I'm a Door-mat, and I shall stay where I am!"

The Doctor swung himself sharply round, and made summons of authority. Treacles and the grass-widower ranged into sight. Their orders were to dowse and scatter the bonfire.

"If they try it on, sir, we shall squib them!" said Tristram. The men faced a furious singeing; their buckets were dexterously tripped for them, still they

came on and began to beat open the fire-stack. The heat of that, glowing to a white incandescence within, drove them back for a moment to fetch breath. They found themselves bonneted with the empty pails, about the exterior of which sticks rattled.

"Torches!" cried Tristram. He seized up a burning faggot and swung it. "Come on, you fellows!"

Two or three others joined; mad blood was up; they advanced in a smother of fire and smoke, whirling their weapons wide. Tristram's shin was caught by a descending bucket, he hacked it ahead of him; that and its fellow went spinning down the field, a troop after them crying "Hurrah!" The torch-bearers stuck to their bigger game. The Doctor had to stand by with what dignity he could muster, and see his myrmidons harried to the boundaries.

Tristram chose to be insolent in Latin. "*Trespassores erunt prosecuti!*" he cried. The language chosen, and the doggish use of it, gave it point to the ears for which it was intended. As soon as, with the rest, he had chevied the pair beyond bounds, he came back at a run to where the Beak was still standing.

"I'm sorry, sir, that you set them on to us," was his first delivery. "I think you had no right to."

"What my rights are, I shall prove to you very shortly, sir!" said the enraged Doctor.

Tristram said, "We'd do anything in reason to oblige you; but the bonfire has taken us a lot of trouble, and our people know of it."

"If they do not, Gavney, they certainly will!" said Doctor Coney.

Tristram threw up his head. "Have you any complaint to make, sir?" he enquired with an amazing assumption of innocence.

"Something more than a complaint, you will find, Gavney!"

"The complaint here, sir, is ours, I think," retorted the lad.

"I don't discuss it with you," said the Doctor. "We return to the subject on Monday." He turned his back on them and walked away.

Tristram, to show that he stood where he did before, sent a resolute word after the retreating figure.

"Good-night, sir!"

It echoed down the field unanswered.

The boys drew round Tristram with hushed applause; they admired his momentary snatch of victory, but could not blink what must needs come after. In tones of awe and curiosity they asked him what he was going to do now.

"Do!" said Tristram. "Are there any more rockets?"

In another minute a salvo went up. It was near midnight when the Tramp reached home.

The next day brought Jim Bowling, son of a Bembridge doctor, on a special errand to Tristram. What was he going to do? he was asked once more. He had no intention of doing anything, and enquired why it was expected of him. He was told not to be an ass.

"Look here!" said Bowling. "My father's all on our side" (He wouldn't be if he were the school-medical, thought Tristram), "and he says Coney's an interfering old ass, and deserves all the setting down he can get. Well; so he has started a roundrobin, and the rest have taken it up; and every one of us is going to turn up to-morrow morning with a letter from our people to say that what we did was with their knowledge and consent. That'll be all right, won't it?"

"Oh yes, that'll be all right for you," said Tristram.

"Well, don't go leaving yourself in the lurch and standing out a martyr!" Bowling discerned that possible weakness in Tristram.

"With me it's different," the other replied.

"How different?"

"Well, I'd give something to be able to leave school."

"It mayn't be a matter of leaving."

"If he touches me, I leave. You may be jolly certain of that!"

"Well," said Bowling, "I think he will touch you."

Tristram answered, "Then, there's an end of it."

And for any practical outcome of their present conference it was. Bowling reported on his return to Bembridge, that Gavney had a mind for facing the switch without any parental protection; but he hinted that there might yet be a scene, and a problem in physics to be solved when the time came.

"If he kicks," said one, "shan't we back him?"

Bowling shrugged. "He don't consult us," said he; "why should we? If he chooses his own way, he must go it alone."

Nevertheless there was expectation that Gavney would not tamely submit himself, nor become a public spectacle except by compulsion. They were mistaken.

Tristram had an early interview with Doctor Coney, and an opportunity to speak his mind. He found that gentleman at his desk behind a pile of letters. "If you bring me a letter it will be of no avail for you?" were the Doctor's first words. Tristram assured him he had none. He beheld his fate in a determined eye. Nothing that he said at the interview diminished his offence.

When at the end of morning school the bell rang all in to call-over, Tristram appeared with a calm face. Names were read over; and at the finish day-boys had not to be excluded. It was no great merit to know how to take a licking; but for a fellow almost to go out of his way to let it fall on him was a little surprising. The Doctor had his mind on Tristram's parting word: "Remember,

sir, if you punish me publicly, I will repay it publicly!" and had his reinforcements at hand against any event. They were not needed. Tristram took his thwackings with stolid exterior.

The whole school trooped out into the playground; the Door-mats raised a loyal cheer and gathered round their stricken hero on his appearance. Tristram's eyes were at sharp play; lighting on young Tom Coney, they stopped from their quest. That blameless youth heard his name sung out like a word of command, and beheld confronting him a white, stung face that bade him stand. Tristram was polite, "I'm sorry to have to hurt you," said he.

"I should be sorry if you tried!" retorted the other, wondering what was meant.

The two lads were of equal height; Coney's was the thicker build.

"Your father has thrashed me," said Tristram, "now I thrash you, unless you like to save trouble at once by carrying him this message for me." The message was indicated smartly; young Coney was quick to let the sender have it back again. Neither of them drew back then. Etiquette called them off to ground allowed by usage to stern encounters such as this. Sixty boys headed away in a rush to get places; on the way Tristram called on Bowling to be his second. Coats were soon off and belts made tight. "Now, if you please, Dr. Coney," said Tristram, for the rest to hear, fitting the title to his opponent, and with a visionary's eye sprang in to the attack. He made all perceive that it was the Beak himself he had before him; every blow he dealt out was against that unjust authority, and those received coming from the same source only kindled him to a more virtuous ardour.

Young Tom, with his father's honour to protect, hit

out valiantly; for ten minutes by the clock he seemed more unlike taking a thrashing than giving one to his opponent. Bowling, whispering encouragement at a moment when it seemed sorely needed, heard Tristram mutter, "Oh, I'm all right. Can't turn my tail, don't you see!" and was relieved to discover his principal in such spirits. Tristram could explain afterwards that he really did not feel the blows delivered against the forepart of him. The panacea was behind. "I was bound to win," he said, "— short of a knock-out; and I was just enough his equal for that not to be likely. I tell you, if you want to feel certain of yourself, get a thrashing first!"

Yet it took him twenty minutes to arrive at his certainty. At the finish, there were few pins to choose between them; but Tom Coney promised to carry the sense of Tristram's message to the Doctor — to state the case, that was to say. The two boys shook hands on it, Tristram averring that his opponent was not to think himself a tale-bearer: the exacter the account the better would he love him.

The Door-mats, lifting their hero on high, bore him enthusiastically off the school grounds — a painful progress for him, and one that he was destined never to retrace.

The next morning a letter was received at the Valley House requesting Mr. Gavney to withdraw his son from the school.

CHAPTER XVI

A CHAPTER OF CONTRASTS

TRISTRAM had never seen his father so moved. "My son expelled!" he kept repeating, and requested the culprit if he had any respect for himself to invent no excuses. Tristram had to sit and listen. "What will your poor mother say!" cried his father, seeing him remain stolid.

"It depends on what she is told!" retorted the lad.

"Told! what is she to be told but the truth? This is the way you shorten her life! The whole episode is disgraceful! A son of mine! You associate with your inferiors; pick them out, it seems, as fitter material for the stirring up of rebellion: and from that go on publicly to insult your head-master. To-day I send him my apology, and shall promise him yours, to be made as he shall dictate, if he will consent to your return."

Tristram cried out that no apology should come out of his lips. "I'd die first!" was his way of putting it.

"Where do you think you are going to finish your education?" his father asked, with a better sense of proportion; and when "other schools" were suggested (Tristram having one particularly in his mind's eye) let his son understand with sudden frankness of speech, that he could not afford it.

"If you think I am to spend extra money to relieve

you of the results of your folly," said Mr. Gavney, "let me tell you that you come at the wrong time."

"I thought ——" said Tristram, and paused.

"You thought?"

"That Aunt Doris had left enough: Mother told me something about it one day." The boy seemed ashamed to speak.

His father said curtly, with offended tone, "Your cost already covers what is available. Understand I can pay no more for you than I do now. You make but a poor return on the outlay, I think. Does this last exploit encourage me to increase it?"

Tristram's face burned with confusion and anger. He said desperately in self-defence: "You never told me, sir, that we were poor."

"Who tells you? who tells you?" cried Mr. Gavney with irritation. "Am I to be questioned, and have words imputed to me if I cannot make my ends meet your extravagant expectations? Do you disgrace me, because you think I have means to repair your mistakes?"

Tristram became altogether mute: his father beheld a stock-solid face of impenitent opposition. It stung him to demand a definite submission. "On my return to-night you will have a written apology ready to accompany mine!" was Mr. Gavney's last word. "You hear?"

"I hear," said Tristram. When his father enquired for him twelve hours later he was not to be found.

At that moment the Sage's housekeeper was having the benefit of his presence. He had arrived in the late afternoon only to find his old friend absent. By the looks of him he was fagged out, for his coming there was an after-thought, when fatigue had warned him to seek some destination for the night. A welcome waited him; he had hardly to ask for a night's lodging, so ready was the offer of it. The evening of the morrow brought the

Sage, and all the fine story of himself had to be gone over. The lad told it ruefully enough, but on certain points doggedly; he did not now expect to be commended, but he was prepared to do battle for what he considered his principles. He was convinced at least that he had done nothing disgraceful; and the word had been hurled at him: had sent him out of the house "for ever," as he had declared to himself dramatically, vowing henceforth to be a free man. He had spent two objectless days in finding that the vocation hung heavy on his hands.

The Sage's rebuke came from an unexpected quarter. "What on earth," he demanded, "had sane, healthy English youth to do with that most vile of modern follies and abominations called fireworks. 'Twas a conspicuous product of Lucifer the fallen; and came hot out of hell, its chief factory; 'twas the gift of Prometheus to men derisively thrown to waste; the folly of Babel breaking out in the ministry of fire whose pure tongue was to preach the sacredness of the domestic hearth;" and a hundred more things over which the Sage made eloquent and giddy comparisons. He told the boy emphatically that to handle the fires of idolatry destroyed the moral consciousness; that he was bound to be wrong enlisting himself in such a cause.

Tristram took the rebuke in good part, knowing himself free to argue on level terms with this antagonist, in the mountains of whose prejudice existed no malice; who had the gift of making opposition the bond of friendship, and with whom to be poles apart implied no rancour deeper than of the tongue. The self-applause which affronted youth is keen to detect in the wisdom of its elders lay but surface-deep — in the crustiness, that is to say — of the wise rattle-pated Sage. To work off his hot blood, Tristram could not have come to a better place of exercise. He carried the war into his mentor's com-

parisons, declaring the unfallen angels also to have a *penchant* for fireworks, and citing Scripture. The Sage could point out to him in return that right-minded man had exhibited a wholesome dread of their display: expulsion from Eden and a crushed foot were the two results recorded on the points instanced.

Tristram boasted a battered shin, a back yet more battered, and a face bearing the marks of desperate combat; he thought he had earned honourably by these expulsion from a place which was to him no Eden at all. Through the frank laughter the Sage got out of him, showed the hard edge of a determination to make no retraction to an authority which had seized ells where inches were but its questionable property. The boy's final position came to be: "Yes, I may have behaved badly; but I'd a right to!" He had to laugh at himself as soon as that remark came to be heard.

The Sage discerned the limits of his conquest: Tristram was no longer unduly proud of his achievement; internally he was moved to see error in himself; outwardly to those who had dealt high-handed judgment against him he was adamant. He put in another way, to the more sympathetic ears which now heard him, what he had already told his father. "It would be mere cowardice for me to go back and say what I did not feel!" And the Sage, understanding how in that mood the wheat and tares stood mingled, and mindful of a wise parable, became an advocate of the boy's claim to do penance without strains to his conscience.

"Tristram is with me," he wrote to the boy's father. "An order from you for his return he would now obey; that is why I beg you not to send it." He followed up the request with rather wordy wisdom, in the main a true enough reading of that unruly character. Perhaps the dead hand of Doris gave some guidance to his pen.

Mr. Gavney read little meaning into the old man's periods, but was flattered that Celebrity should be at such pains and take so eloquent an interest in his son's career. He trusted there was sense in the advice, and accepted the glory of having a famous man for his confidential adviser. His thanks to the Sage conveyed to Tristram the inference of at least a formal pardon for his misdemeanour. He was not required to eat humble-pie before Dr. Coney; it seemed unnecessary to tell him that that offended dignitary had already refused the offer.

Tristram wrote penitently to his father of the trouble he had caused, and a certain measure of gratitude warmed his words, making them humble. Mr. Gavney styled it, "a very proper letter." It brought from Mrs. Gavney a tender epistolary caress to the pardoned sinner; and therewith a hinted reproach that he had not come to her for mediation and advice when difficulties had befallen him. Tristram's thoughts flew out in kisses to the delicate apprehensive face of his would-be confidante, who understood so little her inability to bear the worry of any thinking but what the conventions of life brought her.

Cooler consideration showed to Mr. Gavney that his son's school failure had relieved him of a difficulty; he did not feel bound now to afford him the final polish of a university career; he regretted that the release should be so great a convenience under present circumstances, but there it was. In the matter of another school — also a public school which would be so expensive — he could plead Tristram's practical expulsion from Friars-gate as an obstacle. It remained then to fit him for the inheritance in trade awaiting him at Sawditch, while still giving him the veneer of culture required in a gentleman.

The Doris legacy? well, he trusted as a parent that he

was spending it honestly for his son's benefit — his eventual benefit, which was, after all, the business in which his life itself would have to be spent — without rendering an account to the uttermost farthing. When Tristram came of age he should hear a satisfactory explanation of the matter; in his own mind "& Son" would then be the virtual terms under which the business was to go flourishing. It was the generous out-look natural to a sanguine man; and he had the proud belief that his son, rid of the early tares of youth, would grow up like-minded to himself, with a disposition for business equal to his own.

The problem of the completion of Tristram's education, more especially of his initiation into the theory of commerce, lay easy of solution: Mr. Gavney found himself hand in glove with Fate. One, Gilpinger, for many years right-hand man and head clerk at the works, but lately retired from office on savings and a grievance, had come to live on the outskirts of Bembridge. Mr. Gavney knew of no better man to give his son technical instruction in the commercial side of the business he was to belong to. A temper of increasing crustiness had caused Gilpinger to become a clog to the establishment. Clerks refused to work under him; he had not the eye that could wink at venial irregularities; the waste of a minute won threat of a report for dismissal; his rectitude was austere, growling, and without a grace in its manifestations. There had been storm; a body of valuable clerks had offered their resignation. Mr. Gavney had considered Gilpinger's age, his manifest infirmity of temper, and had bidden him take the rest he now deserved. Thus it was that the old clerk sat at home, pathetically empty-handed, hating the sunshine of unoccupied hours, while his eye could still snap up a column of figures, and his head foregather the meaning of disturbed markets and fluctuat-

ing prices. Resentment perhaps caused him to utter jeremiads against the house which had shaken off his serviceable dust; yet a personal loyalty to his old employer still clung to him.

The offer that he should have the coaching of Tristram in the large mysteries of commerce, was as a restored testimonial to his powers. It was settled that the youth should come to him three mornings a week for instruction; old books of the firm were sent down to him, that he might have means at hand for practical demonstration; he beheld himself surrounded by a library which represented the labours of a lifetime, very different to that wherewith old Daddy Wag-top comforted his loneliness.

Tristram, coming penitentially to bear the burden of his sins and to be for the first time in his life industrious at something lying right away from real interests, met and recognised an enthusiast. A mind wondrous for docketed contents and innumerable pigeon-holes opened to give him its stores, and stuffy as they were, the boy discovered a perverted romance in mathematics that seethed with the hum of markets, and in figures that represented men rushing to ruin or to fortune. The old fellow's finger pointed the tortuous way the firm had wound past this and that peril, to safety and affluence; that was his work more perhaps than Mr. Gavney was aware. Of what went on under present conditions, Mr. Gilpinger indicated a jealous ignorance.

Tristram watched with fascination the massive grasp the old man's mind had on years represented merely by columns of figures, checked over everywhere in red and blue ink. His memory could inspire his hand to turn back unerringly over a hundred pages and show cause and just impediment why this or the other had not to be done for the firm's welfare; and more, too, how the keen eye of supervision had detected an inefficient or dishonest

stewardship. The sight was comparable to that of a general with commissariat army and transport. The boy's brain whirled, seasick and tossed; he began to settle that he had no head for figures, and must presently fall down in penitent despair at his father's feet and beg to be let off.

Presently the old man let him know that he had but taken him up on to Pisgah-top to give him a glimpse of the Promised Land, and a longing for its glories. He brought him down to dry figures, and so smoothed his teaching with the methodical accuracy of long experience, that Tristram, finding no difficulties at all, was left with the deadly dulness of the thing and the caged thought somewhere at the back of his brain that he owed all this to a night of fireworks and a beating.

Often at the end of his three hours' tuition, he would leap up wild of eye on the stroke of time, as if to hear another syllable on the subject would be too much for his endurance. For recompense he would arrive home breathless; his body became hard and lean with much running — the result of arithmetic and book-keeping. No new thing, one might suppose, since he had already been through some schooling, but with this difference: he began to see that instead of a thing almost meaningless, or laid on him for discipline, it meant life: days and days of what he was to expect, made bearable to him for the present only because old Gilpinger loved him after a sour fashion of his own, and took a pride in his progress.

Looking out with a glum eye on the clock to know if his pupil would be punctual, he would brighten his crabbed looks to welcome a scrambled arrival which was always just not late. Tristram could have loved him in return, had the bond between them been a little more to his liking; as it was, his respect mounted to an enormous enthusiasm. He told Marcia, when writing word of his

new studies, that the House was what it was, and they themselves what they were, because old Gilpinger had the biggest head for figures in the three kingdoms. "When he's dead they ought to have his brain weighed!" he declared. It was with a puzzled sensation of distress that he heard one evening from his father that this mighty mind of business was positively gratified over his application and progress. "Hopeful" was one of the words used; and the youth's heart metaphorically rapped the floor over all that such hope betokened. Thus was Tristram inducted into the path destined for his feet.

Over the other side of his training, gentle and classical, he had less cause to sigh: it brought Ray back to him. That youth was in trouble to pass his "smalls," a standard too high for his attainment after a course of public-school athletics, to which brain-work had stood secondary. If college was to be his next step, a coach had become necessary. The two friends went in company, morning and afternoon, to a solitary curate quartered at Long Alwyn under Randogger, as spiritual guide to all the scattered community living between Parson's Coppice and Hiddenden. The youths found it a good neighbourhood for the recreation which sandwiched perfunctory scholarship. Some of their Latinity they carried over to Hiddenden, and dropped raw and crude into the delighted ears of Daddy Wag-top. Wilder rambles found them in the company of old Haycraft, with whom sometimes Tristram would leave Raymond and be carried off by Lizzie to the less manly but more exciting sport of birds'-nesting. Few as the words were that he ever got from her he found that she had a fine instinct for the game. She would as often nod her meaning as speak it: she could keep a secret that habit seemed to say. It brought him to be observant of each passing look: often over a clutch of eggs their eyes met triumphantly, till at last, after many meetings

and partings, the Tramp's began to carry a clear memory of the brownness in hers. The note they gave him of her inner character was very pleasant. He judged people by their eyes; these were the brownest he had ever seen, the clearest depths of a shaded brook shared that note of deadened gold infinitely charged with shadows of a like tone; nothing that touched common air was quite the same. The boy, looking into their mystery as into a picture-book, was too raw as yet to read any romance into them; but vaguely they appealed to him, making comradeship easy. So did her brief, direct utterance, and those long silences which, when a quest was on, made her so commendable a companion. She was two years his senior, and the beauty of early day which hung about her visage, shadowy under dark folds of hair, promised to be greater. He noted her stride and the confidence with which she lifted weights; everything approved her to his eyes. Had he been sentimentally-drawn, he would presently have been mooing calf-love to her; but he was still at the age when friendship, not sex, kindles the mind to its romance. Latent, under the healthy run of his blood, the animal in him said a word or two; but it found and let go again without any disturbances to their relations. She was a girl just bordering on womanhood, without that consciousness of the fact, which disturbs the charm while making it dangerous. Tristram recalled how Raymond had first put her down as sulky, and still so thinking, he supposed, by something in his manner, had taught her to dislike him; for of Raymond she fought shy. It mattered little: the Tramp's knack of comradeship lay in the limits of two, finding in three, according to the adage, not company but society: to be one of four was to be in a crowd.

The limitation made his affections appear more weather-cock-like than they really were; his life seemed a process

of desertions, till the opportunity came for an affection to reassert itself. Marcia, home for a holiday from her own schooling, had her turn of finding herself approved once more. Her brother contemplated her for some days, puzzled and charmed by the stranger in her. He solved his problem at last by supposing her to be grown-up and "finished" in all the educational graces that were her due. He paid her a naïve compliment by enquiring, "I say, Marcia, aren't you very pretty?" and really required to be told or rather confirmed in his own opinion, which might be the result of brotherly blindness or family prejudice in her favour. He consulted his mother on the subject, with Marcia's laugh ringing at him, and finally, to get an outsider's opinion, Raymond, who said, "Yes!" with an emphasis that made him proud. After that he remained quite certain of Marcia's exceeding prettiness. Her spirits were quite as they used to be, and the moral phase in her had been comfortably tucked to rest; if it peeped ever, to moderation, it was with a twinkle. She gave him anecdotes of the cousins, outlining pleasant conditions, but letting him understand that the end of it would bring her back "home" to him.

Now they could have ridden together and taken big breaths of the country-side, but were confronted by a stable reduced to the modest requirements of Mrs. Gayney's daily drive, a silent indication of things about which no word was ever said to them. Tristram said, "I get a ride, though, now and then?" and looked mysterious. He told his sister he could ride bare-backed, and that no horse could get him off. She declared she had done the same for a wager among her Foley cousins, and not told, since the thing would have been thought unladylike there. The bit of news solved for Tristram some fresh part of her developed character. "Why, you are like Lizzie!" he declared, and seemed to have lighted on the reason

why the two of them were so satisfactory. Now he saw a resemblance in looks as well, and took Marcia to make the acquaintance of her rustic double. On their meeting the likeness fell away. Lizzie drew into her shell and showed so awkwardly, that Tristram was surprised to hear Marcia say that she liked her. To give Lizzie a title to such favour, he told his sister of the Amazon courage the girl possessed — Duffin's horses in the secluded fields under Randogger Edge knew it if nobody else did. Dawn was the time; he and she in the grey mists of that hour had ridden races under a chill air. They had their eye, too, on a field where lively colts ran loose, owner unknown. Marcia was invited to the spectacle but declined, calling them horse-lifters.

Tristram should not have boasted: a week after Marcia's departure, he got a surprising fall. Unaccountably it was his foot and not his head that met with damage. He got himself up, and tried limping with Lizzie's aid, but had to give in; the jolt of it was too much for him. They had two fields and a brook to cross before getting to any foot-track. Lizzie took him up on her back, an easy task to her strength, and too sensible for the Tramp to make more than a show of protest. Her hearty service to him in his disablement caused him as a sort of honourable obligation to make little of the pain: having a pang at one end he became the more frivolous at the other. It was ridiculous, yet nice, to feel himself aloft by the strength of this firm piece of budding womanhood, who strode evenly under the weight of him. "After all," he said, "what's the difference? Instead of a colt I've got a filly! Woa, my girl!" Lizzie bade him not talk.

He blew into her hair behind, called it her mane, and teased her with the phraseology of the stable. When she threatened to drop him if he did not cease his nonsense, he called her vicious, and talked about her mouth in

terms of bit and bridle. Shy, he said, was good for a woman, but bad for a horse. "Are you shy, my filly?" Beginning with boyish chaff, his talk took a thoughtless run into mischief; the situation made him a little more foolish. Just when she stepped down with him to the brook, he thought a good moment for being rather more absurd than ever. A skin-deep idea that to be in love with her would be nice, caused him to rub his cheek on hers and ask like a fondling fool — Did she love him or no!

Apparently no; he found himself abruptly deposited, legs in water, with a sharp wrench to the injured ankle; and beheld Lizzie sitting angry-eyed on the further bank.

Sight of her face was sufficient to make him say, "Serve me right!" and to beg pardon, humbly. He meant it, and had taken his lesson. It came at the right moment to help him over the crude mock-turtle season, which raw youth goes through on its way to the makings of a man. Lizzie, the playmate, had by a simple display of mettle, received stature and gained his respect. She showed her magnanimity by coming back to fetch him across, and the culprit took the favour as a very proper chastisement. She had not again to complain of him. If thereafter Tristram cogitated on the growing charm of womanhood, he did so with a greater respect than educational convention had taught him, and for that had to thank Lizzie.

That good girl showed her forgiveness of him by making no change in her frank acceptance of his friendship. Coming upon her at dawns in the yet twilight fields to help fill her mushroom basket, he found in her an untroubled and untroubling type of fair womanhood, carrying out for him into the world of her sex the sisterhood of Marcia. In those primal hours, when tentative lights and colours washed in faint waves over the

threshold of the sun, she seemed to have part in the spirit of the wind itself which sprang, harbinger of day, equable and cool with the wide breath of health. Dawn, for those who will rise to it, is the daylight hour of the soul, so little then does the body hinder that perspective of the higher intelligence which momentarily opens to us all. In this year of his life, following the freaks of his blood, Tristram grasped something of its health-giving significance, and felt in his veins a response to the divine alchemy. By his side during many of these hours Lizzie Haycraft moved humble yet sisterly. On a later day he had to remember that debt, and to the best of his ability he paid it.

CHAPTER XVII

APOLOGIES TO LADY PETWYN

TWO days later Tristram was still limping tenderly on a convalescent foot, when his father threw down before him a letter from Lady Petwyn, abrupt, and couched in outrageous terms, giving stiff warning that his son's trespasses were no longer to be tolerated. She spoke of previous communications; none had come.

Mr. Gavney finding feud at work where he had still hoped one day to find favour, was the more indignant with his son as the cause of it. He demanded to know what it all meant in a voice of irresolute chagrin. He fought the air to discover a larger grievance.

"I have a right to be offended!" he exclaimed; "I have worries enough!" was a pathetic after-thought. He wished to be deaf to anything Tristram could say, as the way was with him; argument upset his judgment.

But on this occasion his son showed a readiness to fall in with his strictest demands: he would go himself, he said, and apologise; no time should be lost. A few hours afterwards he set off as proud as Lucifer on his self-imposed errand of humility. Underneath Lady Petwyn's terms of opprobrium he scented MacAllister, the rank fox that he was!

By that wily official's contrivance the Tramp had been given long rope to hang himself. He had announced with covert insult that Lady Petwyn's word would be enough

for him; nor did MacAllister doubt that a note from her, civilly worded, would have sufficed to put an end to the nuisance. But things had got to such a pitch between him and the youth that his rancour could not so be satisfied. He complained moderately to her ladyship at stated intervals, but omitted to send on the merely conventional complaints for which he received direction. Thus it came about at last that an absolute defiance in Tristram's attitude was conveyed to her.

The affair of the loose-ridden colts, of which an eye-witness brought word, gave the finishing touch to an indignation artfully stimulated. MacAllister wanted to get his hand on the boy; but on cool reflection had decided that for such a step he required the backing of his employer's authority. When at last he got it he could assure himself that, whatever extremities he might proceed to, the legal penalties would not be allowed to fall upon him.

Behind his back the lady's liking for a fair field and no favour undid all his plans. She wrote openly to Tristram's father that, ordinary complaints failing, she had given orders to her bailiff that the boy should be whipped off the ground if found committing depredations on her property.

The Tramp was aware of none: in all his record he believed he had done no damage. With the possible exception of the colts-episode — and those he had not known to be her property — he had been guilty of nothing worse than fair trespass, a thing allowable under the broad laws of England. If his mood was apologetic, it was with a high head that he rang at the doors of Hill Alwyn, and demanded admission to the presence of its mistress.

A footman carried word of him, and returning after a while ushered him into the crippled presence.

Lady Petwyn was waiting to receive him. She remained seated, and bowed with ironic ceremony to a tall lad at the awkward age, whose movements escaped the reproach, showing even a grace, which the slight limp he brought with him tended to enhance.

Prettily and frankly he made his apologies. She chose to think they were done to escape a beating, and gave him to understand that they came rather late after the offence.

"That is not my fault," he said; "your ladyship must have chosen an untrustworthy messenger. It is of that I have to complain."

"Oho!" quoth the other, "so it's a complaint I'm to listen to, is it?" She heard the heads of it concisely put; and was able to perceive that it was more an errand of protest than of apology that had brought him to her.

"This morning," said Tristram, "I heard your wishes for the first time, though ever so long ago I gave my word to attend to them if you thought my running about did any harm. In your letter you are good enough to say I am to be horse-whipped off the estate. I promise you, your wish alone is sufficient. Mr. MacAllister tried to get in with his horse-whip before, and failed."

"It seems, however," said Lady Petwyn, "that you have repeatedly ignored his remonstrances, though knowing him to be my agent."

"He and I have had rows," answered Tristram; "I took it he was merely trying on his authority to spite me. A word from you would have ended the matter; by not carrying out your instructions he has made me be unintentionally rude to you. I am very sorry."

"Made me be very intentionally rude to *you*, I suspect you to mean," said the lady, amusing herself over the boy's covert demand for an apology.

"It shan't happen again," he promised.

"No!" she laughed, catching at cross-purposes to confuse his assurance, "I'll do my best that it shan't. Apologies given and received; we accept each other's excuses. *I* withdraw the horse-whip, and you let poor MacAllister alone. Is that so?"

Tristram thanked her, adding, "Then I am to understand that you wish me to keep altogether off the estate?"

Before denying the wish, "It seems you have done damage," said the lady.

"I go about everywhere," replied Tristram, "and none of the farmers make any complaint."

"You have a taste for horses; ride, it seems; not always with discretion," was her countering stroke, to show that she had reason on her side.

"If I get a chance, I do," he admitted.

"Other people's horses; of course, with their permission?" She put the point with crafty interrogation.

"Oh, that?" Tristram smiled, to show that at last he gathered her meaning. "It's for a special thing, then, I have to ask your pardon. I've been punished for it. The colts, you mean? They were in one of Duffin's fields, I might have thought they were his. Had I supposed they were yours, I would have thought twice before making use of them."

With Farmer Duffin's more genial qualities thus pleasantly hinted to her, Lady Petwyn enquired:—

"And what does your Duffin say when they happen to be his?"

Tristram was lured on by the lady's tone to let go the roguish impertinence of a full statement: "Oh, he and I are quite friends. Probably when he sees me next he says, 'Drat your carcass,' with, maybe, just another word thrown in."

"A very suitable remark," observed the lady; "without

our being exactly friends I may be permitted to endorse it. And your friendship with Duffin continues?"

"Oh yes; you see, we understand each other," said the boy.

"I accept the rebuke," said Lady Petwyn; "you and I, it seems, do not. My fault, no doubt. So, since the other thing is beyond us, let us instead come to a full *mis*understanding, and have done with it! For the future, trampling over my land is forbidden you; you will please quite to misunderstand that!"

"I will obey your wishes, Lady Petwyn," he replied stiffly.

She laughed out at his defensive simplicity. "I think you are making a mock of me," she said. "But let that go; we've done!"

Throughout the interview Tristram had been standing; now she pointed him to a chair. "So then," she said, "business is over; we've both apologised, both been forgiven. Please to sit down a moment. I ask it as a favour."

Tristram dropped to the seat indicated, and waited. She fixed him with an unwinking eye, and perused his features. He gazed back in frank curiosity to know what she meant by it, finding himself in the presence of a new and strange breed.

Lady Petwyn finished her study of him.

Decidedly she liked the creature.

"Is it your friendship or your acquaintance I am to make?" she asked him abruptly.

He was taken aback by her sudden cordiality. "I think you are very kind to wish either," he replied, "after you've found me so troublesome."

"That," she retorted, "is the first dishonest remark you have made to me!"

"Well," objected the youth, "I'm a trespasser, and

you've warned me off. How's friendship to come out of that?"

"When did I warn you off?"

"You said I wasn't to trample."

"That you were to *mis*understand: it seems that, like an idiot, you have done just the contrary. Listen, here! Do what you will; come and go as you will; don't break fences; be civil to MacAllister; and if you do a damage, report yourself! It has gone too far now for me to promise that he shan't frown at you; but you shan't be horse-whipped. Will you write him a formal apology?"

"No, I won't! To you, I will, Lady Petwyn."

"Then *I* must — for letting you on; that's all about it! After all, the man had my authority, and you flouted it. Go and tell him I've winked at you!"

She sheered off, without listening to his protests and thanks, to enquire curiously: —

"And the other; the petticoat, who also rides bare-backed, and can stick on, it seems: — who is she?"

Tristram laughed. "That was Lizzie Haycraft," he informed her.

"What? daughter of old Haycraft, the vicar's poacher? Is she another of your friends?"

The Tramp's answer was a plump affirmative, heartily uttered. The old dame eyed him discreetly.

"How old are she and you?"

"From seventeen and on. She's the elder, I fancy."

"Very well; you shouldn't teach a girl to straddle at that age. It damages her character."

"She taught herself, though," said Tristram. "It's the natural way."

"Loss of character is? Oh yes, no doubt!" Lady Petwyn let further thought on the subject lie unspoken. She said in matter-of-fact tones, "If you want to ride, come and take one of my horses for an airing; and if there

is anything else that will enable our better acquaintance, if you can think of it, name it!"

Tristram asked if he might have the run of the ponds.

"For fishing?" she enquired.

"Yes, if I may; but I meant for boating or bathing. It was over that that MacAllister and I fell to loggerheads." He told her the whole story; Lady Petwyn sat through it grim with suppressed laughter.

"Well!" she exclaimed at the finish, "I must say you behaved abominably; it's lucky, when MacAllister reproaches me, that I can plead ignorance. You got my word out of me first, remember that! Keys you'll want; they are not supposed to be transferable. If the vicar goes lending them to professional trespassers he may as well give them up altogether. I don't suppose he uses them."

"Oh, but Raymond does when he is at home," said Tristram.

"Raymond; who is he?"

"Young Hannam; he's my friend."

"Oh! another friend," grunted the lady; "you are a dangerous gang, the whole lot of you."

She vowed at parting that she must humble herself to MacAllister. Tristram anticipated her; he met the bailiff at his own door.

"Mr. MacAllister," said he, "I've been to see Lady Petwyn, and she has made matters right. I'm to be a trespasser no longer, and she says that you and I are not to quarrel any more. Since we can't be friends, let's do our best to be neutrals. Shall that be the bargain?"

The bailiff looked at him under a fixed lowering of the eyelids, and made reply. "To be neutrals, Mr. Gavney, one needs to have a bad memory. I've a good one!" He turned and went into his house.

"Well, you are an honest beast," said Tristram to him-

self, watching him disappear. "Yet a dishonest one, too, or I'm much mistaken."

There could be no doubt that Lady Petwyn had made her offer with the intention that it should be accepted. A set of keys came to the Valley House for Tristram with her ladyship's compliments, and his letter of thanks brought an intimation that a horse was kicking its legs off in her stables waiting for him to try it. The lady denied that she had any kindly intention in the matter. "You pay for the keys," she told him, "by exercising my horses. If you will only use one of the beasts regularly I can keep a groom the less. They have nothing to do but go out riding on what spare mounts I keep for my occasional visitors. Farmer Duffin, on the contrary, doesn't want his horses extra ridden."

Tristram became an occasional companion to the lady when she rode out. She found his views of life entertaining: he quoted his friend, the Sage, and swore by all the unreasonable high morality of that great student of the eternal economies. It was her pleasure to flout him and put logical spokes into the wheel of his argument, having, for her own part, strong notions of the uselessness of all man's efforts to mend a bad world not of his own making. "Why turn scavenger?" she asked him. "Leave that to the vestries, clerical and lay; they are a breed by themselves."

Her ideas to him sounded terrific and abominable. Yet under mountains of evil-speaking and enmity, she concealed a contemptuously humane heart. If she knew herself, it was only up to a point. Stood she ever self-convicted of an act that went beyond her theory of limitations she would scold herself with angry repetition, and would endeavour to eradicate the weakness by an indulgence of unreasonable animosity in some other direction. Thus, if she pardoned a stableman for drink one day, she

would probably give her cook notice the next. She humoured herself infinitely in thinking proudly of her vices, and boasted childishly of things she should have been ashamed of. She claimed to have taught her butler to be honest with the wine, by throwing at his head a bottle of inferior quality which had come up for her consumption.

"At his head," was her word for it; actually, she had pushed the offending vintage off the table. This had happened in the first days of her widowhood; it taught the servants' hall that a knowledge of wine had not departed from the establishment with the defunct Sir Cooper.

In wrath her tongue became abominable. Tristram hearing it for the first time was fairly aghast. Noticing that he winced, she dismissed her victim, to say in boastful apology: "It took me ten years to beat Sir Cooper at his own game, and I can't afford to drop the habit now I've learned it. I might marry again — we women are all fools!"

She had so dismissed ceremony from their relations that Tristram was able to answer: "Don't marry old Haycraft, then, or you will find yourself a backward student!"

She pretended a wish to have details of so rare a vocabulary.

"He's gorgeous!" declared the Tramp, and there let the matter rest, without sample.

She was so assiduous in showing off her vices to the youth that the wonder was he got through them and was able to like her.

There was no doubt he did. She put him to the test and found him one who would not cringe for her favour. At the second word of her worst, he got up and left her, and believed in doing so that he had made the breach between them irrevocable. A groom overtook him at the

gate, bearing him a scribbled apology. She greeted his return, which was immediate, with the words, "That's the last time I grovel to you, young man! Explanations are not in my line. You must get to understand me!"

"Still ——" said Tristram.

"Oh yes!" growled the old scold; "you may either stop up your ears, or run out of the room. But you will please to come back again without expecting me to run after you!"

She asked him then why he had come back.

"Because I like you," said the youth.

"Like? What is there to like?"

"When I know that, I'll tell you."

"At present, then, you like me as a conundrum?"

"Put it that way, ma'am, if you will."

"My dear," she said, "what I suffer from is a hot head and a cold heart; and a tongue that gets wagged by the two of them."

He told her at last that she was like Queen Elizabeth, and supposed that his affection for her must have a historical basis. He found her the next day reading Green's History. She threw the book at him, and asked — Did he expect rigadoons from her in her old age?

"And I never patted a young man's neck in my life!" she protested.

It was curious that at opposite poles she and the Sage had the same gift; they could make him laugh *at* them, and like them all the better as a consequence. Something youthful lay crusted in both: to each of them he felt it possible to confess his follies — with very different results. Lady Petwyn might be depended on for a jocular encouragement of them; the Sage for extravagant blame. Yet in their secret estimate of him their views reversed: the lady considered him a delicious sweet fool, gloriously headstrong; the Sage had hopes that, could he but beat

the rebel out of his composition, he would grow up to deserve Doris's love for him. He held a letter of hers received but a few days before her death, requiring of him a promise; the answer to it had reached dead hands.

Moralists might guess that at this point they saw Tristram divided between his two angels of good and evil; and that the question was henceforth to be, which of them should have the mastery. But complex influences seldom divide their forces with such simplicity. Had Tristram always followed Lady Petwyn's advice when she seriously gave it, this tale might have remained a comedy.

The energetic dame industriously waylaid the youth's goings. Meeting him in the roads, she would dismount a groom to have his company; and presently had all the will to present to him the particular mount he favoured, but that to continue it as a loan brought him more certainly day by day to her stables.

When the call to attend his father to Sawditch on certain days of the week took Tristram off for the whole day, he came over to Hill Alwyn to secure an early morning canter, at an hour when the grooms were still rubbing their eyes. Lady Petwyn growled like a dog defrauded by its bone. "You do that to avoid me," she snapped. "I'll be even with you!" and the next morning was true to her word.

He assured her it was the dullest of dull reasons that drove him to be so unseasonably early, and heaved a tremendous sigh, naming the trade he was being put to.

"Come out of it, and I'll allow you two hundred a year!" was the bait she threw him.

He shook his head dolefully, "I am paying debts," he said, not knowing how doubly true was the remark; "and besides ——"

The truth was he could not tell what he wanted to be:

could name no calling, unless that of water-finder, whose duties held colours of attraction to him. "A jockey, I might be," he jokingly suggested, after he had taken creditable part in a steeple-chase into which Lady Petwyn had urged the amateur riders of her side of the county.

But from a free choice he was subtly debarred, hardly realising as yet how fast circumstances were involving him.

His father behind his back owned to have become proud of him, and hoped by an indulgent extension of favours to make his son's office-stool with its present drudgery seem to him the ladder to a throne. Could he have given it the semblance of a saddle or a spring-board it had been more to the purpose.

"The Pater says I have a business head!" Tristram grumbled to Marcia. "I have, if an ache is the sign of it!"

Mr. Gavney began to look out sanguinely over present embarrassments. Some capital, it was true, would presently be imperatively needed; he had staved off the day; Tristram on his coming of age could set the deficiency right. Thereafter the firm would go forward with enlarged capacities, and with a higher standing, becoming perhaps something more than prosperous. The cloth-merchant's eye went over-sea to focus visions of future greatness; he hoped some day to see merchandise of his own sailing to all parts of the habitable globe. When his trade had reached that size the meanness of the material would be forgotten; the firm would stand so high that glory, not shame, would be reflected upon him. His heart glowed over the prospect; well might he believe that so much enthusiasm at his age did honour to his paternal instincts. This was for Tristram. He should have advantages which for lack of time had not been his father's before him; he should snuff the marts of the world, an

air infected with the wealth of nations; not trade, commerce — its larger aspect — should reveal to him the great workings of capital and enterprise. London should be the place then for the bringing of desultory energies to their perfect use.

In these calculations Beresford Gavney did not forget society. He intended that his son should take a place within that circle at whose vaguely-defined threshold he himself had stood many years discontentedly awaiting fuller recognition. He did not urge his claim; in his own family he saw it becoming justified. Lady Petwyn, for instance, had not called, yet had chosen to become intimate with his son. He was at pains to conceal the gratification it gave him: even appeared indifferent when the boy spoke of her — as much as to say, "In your leisure you choose your own society; you are a free agent." Yet to his wife he professed himself puzzled that Lady Petwyn, wishing to befriend their son as she evidently did, should still omit the interchange of conventional amenities with his parents.

"I am told she calls nowhere," said his wife. "Some think it is because she will not be seen on foot; they say she is quite hunched when she walks across a room."

If Tristram was without apprehension of the fact that the great lady's acquaintance with him alone made invidious comparisons, another of the family was not. Marcia, he found, would not accompany him on to the private paths of the estate.

"The keys were to you, Tramp," she said; "to nobody else."

"But I used to go with Ray."

"Oh, you! yes: you can do those things; I am only a conventional young woman, and I won't be seen trespassing."

Tristram fidgeted: he liked now to have Marcia with

him when a-foot. Ray had at last passed the necessary entrance test and gone up to Oxford, so for comradeship the Tramp was thrown back on women-folk. Here, for an insufficient reason, was Marcia denying him the pleasure of her company.

Having a puzzle on his mind hints of it showed in his speech one day. He asked Lady Petwyn bluntly whether the keys which had been sent to the Valley House were only for him. "Marcia," he said, "won't use them, and says they are not intended for any one but me."

"So you want that translated into plain English, do you?" enquired the lady. "It means first and foremost that Miss Marcia disapproves of me; secondly, that she's jealous of me; and thirdly, that my manners as a neighbour are detestable. So were yours formerly; that is why we get on with each other now we are reconciled. Very well, the matter shall have my attention."

Two days later there was joy in Mr. Beresford Gavney's breast; Lady Petwyn had left cards in person at the Valley House. At that moment the merchant would have gone to the inconvenient trouble and expense of stabling a horse for his son's use, had Lady Petwyn carried out her half-formed project of sending one.

CHAPTER XVIII

LADY PETWYN'S PAST

THE world is slow to recognise romance out of its accustomed grooves. Youth woos maid, the springtime of two lives rush together, Nature in an outbreak of extravagance looses on them more happiness than ever mortal could claim by right; and at once the overrewarded creatures are made the darlings of popular sentiment. The world becomes green listening to protestations of eternal fidelity, which sober sense knows to be false; for the joy of a season must express itself from the topmost of its vocabulary, and should the lover of a day swear a less word than "forever" in urging his suit, he were untrue to the emotion of a moment that carries in it the semblance of eternity. The disillusioned listen to the overflowings of this natural hyperbole and fall to illusion once more. This pair of lovers, though all the millions paired since the world began have stopped short of their promise, this pair, we say, shall attain their ideal, and justify that greenness of the human eye that springs not of jealousy.

And if the natural base of all this beauty be Nature's claim that the sexes shall meet and propagate, why does so slight a shifting of the desire make it such worlds away, and discover in the race so many callous or thoughtless beings ready to laugh at passion that has missed the blossoming season? The longing of the old maid for a

son to her barren body at the lonely closing-in of her life, is surely as tender a testimonial to bitter Mother Nature as any the maiden can give under seal of her lover's lips. Nay, it is the very phœnix of love rising out of the ashes and disillusions of youth. Life is full enough of things more deserving of ridicule than the passion with which the crabbed, the spoiled, and the aged, go back and seek to reconstruct or retrieve the past.

Some such longing had seized on the stiff gnarled body and jaded mind of Lady Petwyn, at lighting on one who accepted her favour for the simple and sufficient reason of a cordial liking; who had no fear of her frowns, and could to-morrow be independent as air, were her caprice to bid him back to the place he had come from.

She studied him, puzzled to know wherein lay the attraction. "Had you been my son," she owned, "I should have bullied you out of the very thing I like you for being!" Maybe, for all the difference in their years, instinct taught him to see in the debonair motions of his youth, the shadow of the thing she had sought and missed as a match to her own strong energies.

She wooed him, wished to have at once the spoiling and the making of him in her own hands, tried him with her humours, cajoled him with her favours, resented his independence, yet admired it in the same breath. One day she made a pretext for cutting off his rides, declaring that he had lamed one horse and over-ridden another, proving himself not to be trusted with them alone; and found him just as happy on foot, and as friendly. She became jealously convinced that bribes would not bring him any nearer to her affections, and was all the more flattered and taken to see him unaffected by her vile moods and occasional moroseness of demeanor. "The cunning dog makes a point of understaying his welcome," she told herself, to explain her irritated liking for his com-

pany. It was quite an unconscious play of tact on Tristram's part; he believed himself merely quick to follow the signals of the lady herself.

One day he came upon her sitting among heaps of musty documents. A post-mortem mood had seized on her; she had a presentiment, she told him, that she was going to die — prayed it might be with the hounds during the coming winter: and was mindful to spare her executors unnecessary labour. "If to save trouble were all," she remarked, "I might as well put a match to every security I possess, and die intestate; then cousins and the law could wrangle it out at leisure. Executors are usually one's friends: heirs, not necessarily: none of mine are! There are Cooper-Petwyns, and Coopers, who seem to think because I was cooped up with one of them for all the best years of my life and bought up embarrassed property, that I owe it back to them. 'It should stay in the family,' is the phrase they have in their greedy mouths. I tell them they may buy it back if they want to. Their grievance is that Sir Cooper reaped the benefit of a broken entail, if to pay one's creditors by the sale of one's patrimony be indeed a benefit!

"Burn that, and that, and that!" she gave Tristram dusty bundles to throw to the flames.

Presently a curious perturbation came over her face, as she crackled her fingers on a bunch of notes tied up with pack-thread; self-disgust seemed to predominate.

"Am I into my dotage?" she exclaimed. "It would seem so. Here have I been hoarding a budget of my Skeleton's letters for over seventeen years without knowing it!"

She glanced her eye through one of them.

"Poor ghost," she murmured. "How he gibbers! Ghosts I can't stand; they whine too much about a future life, invoking me to be Christian and charitable. My

charity burned a large enough hole in my pocket when it had him to deal with. Thieves got at it then; it's moth and rust now. Help us! What a liar the fellow was: writes he knows I have a kind heart! He knew exactly the contrary, but that was Bones all over: — made love to me when he was dying because he wanted a particular brand to which I had the key, and cursed me in his last will and testament! made a will to do it, I imagine: for he had no money to leave. That's the man my memory's got to deal with! I'm widow to that, my dear; my 'Lady-ship' I got from him!

"When he did his duty finally, and died, I asked the doctor how long it would take him to become bone. Medical science gave me a date. After he was turned into a bone-man, forgiveness of him became possible! And yet his Christian relatives reproached me for putting him in an earth-to-earth coffin; cremation wasn't to be had in those days. Lord! what moles we all are with our prejudices! You know now why I call him 'Bones'; it strips him of his vices. Can you imagine a skeleton taking too much to drink, for instance? No, it's a mercy!"

Tristram's sensitiveness showed a shrinking from such a squalid inspection of the past. The old dame's tongue turned a sharp corner.

"I'm going to tell you a love-story," said she. "That man kicked to death a friend of mine, and I broke my leg jumping too fast out of window to get at him. Providence seems to have stamped on the wrong foot that time; eh? There's one of the things I have to think him out of the flesh for, for comfort's sake. This is not the love-story, but it comes round to it. Bones used to beat his own dogs every day and all day long, but not my boy — till once. That day I heard curses, and all at once Billy give a cry. I knew it for his, out of all others, and ran — could run, I tell you, in those days! Out of window I saw

my poor beast chained, and my other beast in top-boots kicking him. Murder's a quick brew: two of us got the infection. Ever you've been in a real rage you've felt you could fly. Anyway, a woman before she's forty has her hallucinations at times. That was mine. In reality I came smash. There was I along the cobble-stones; and, over the way, butchery by all the fiends! Bones was doing it: Billy, staunch beast, tugging at his chain to be at him. Soon as he saw me, 'twas a double struggle: — he to get my way, I to get his, — I dragging pain along with me that was like a ton of mustard. Down goes Billy just as I got to him. The last I remembered was having hold of Bones's hand with my teeth where Billy had bitten him just before. And for the result of that day's work Sir Cooper had to do without an heir.

"Five years I shared house with him after that. Think of it, and me lame, hobbling with that thing for a memory! He never struck me; I waited for it; he seemed to know why. That's how it is, my dear, I never murdered him. People who knew what he was, thought me a model of duty; and when I die, as I've made no provision against it, I suppose they will lay me alongside of Bones with all the decorum in the world. Poor Bones, how will he like it, I wonder!"

From this narrative Tristram gathered for the first time the full meaning of a certain tombstone in Little Alwyn churchyard. After many years of neglect Lady Petwyn had one day set herself right with the neighbourhood by erecting a handsome memorial over the late Baronet's remains. That had been done within Tristram's own brief memory. He remembered the wording of the inscription, and saw now its underlying significance.

"Here rest," was how it ran, "the bones of Sir Cooper Cooper Petwyn, Bart., Lord of the Manor of Alwyn, sometime Master of the Tavishire Foxhounds, Justice of the Peace."

Date of death and date of erection followed; not a word of sentiment or untruth; only the ponderous eloquence of costly stone to say whether this poor dust had not once its value in men's eyes.

"And now," went on her ladyship, "how did I come to marry him? It's a life of me you will have to hear." So, then and there, Tristram heard from hard withered lips, a brave lady's love-story.

The only love her gaoler of a heart had ever let go to man had won freedom behind sound of galloping hoofs on a road leading she knew not whither. The gallant, fine gentleman, pauper, and rogue, all rolled into one, who was her companion and tempter in that exploit, had beheld her first in a church pew, ranked with the demure misses in their teens, of an aristocratic boarding school; and, more dazzled by her high darting glance than by her fortune — for 'twas whispered there sat an heiress — had come, a stranger, and borne her off under the full stare of day. Adding by a few dextrous strokes ten years to the ten which already made him her senior, he had presented himself in a post-chaise white with the dust of its speed, bearing a missive purporting to tell of a father dying in apoplectic state, as befitted an alderman.

The heiress of two hundred thousand pounds was trustingly confided to a man without a penny that was not borrowed, by a head mistress who had the merit of knowing a gentleman when she saw him.

A mile from the start, being a man of feeling, the gallant dried the young girl's eyes with a broad hint of her father's safety. He bade her look at the bright world that flew past, and draw full breath at being out in it. Did she wish to return?

"Where am I going?" she asked him.

Exactly wherever she liked, he told her, — to Scotland, whose marriages were more made by Heaven than were

England's for preference. He promised her his heart, and white heather instead of orange blossom, yet declared that the decision of the matter rested with her. She tested him once, bidding him put the chaise about. The thing was done promptly. The sight of the school roofs, and the sound of the bell at that moment giving harsh summons to drudgery from which she was free, made her reverse the order. They arrived very late at the inn which was to be their first resting-place. The lover had insisted, in spite of postilions; had even allowed himself to appear in fear of pursuit. They roused a sleeping house; and the cause of his solicitude presently appeared in a respectable waiting-woman whom he had engaged beforehand to keep guard over a young girl's reputation. She received her mistress into safe-keeping, and was able to give evidence after, which was the undoing of the whole scheme. "Heigho!" was the poor lady's regretful comment on that incongruity in the midst of an otherwise romantic and promising episode.

The northward miles flew all too briefly; separation followed hard. After an unchurched clinching before witnesses, the lover handed back his wedded wife to the pursuing and enraged relatives, and went gaily off to endure the legal penalty for abduction which he had incurred. Any church ceremony, if they wished for it, could wait his return to liberty. The girl-wife swore faith to his face and behind his back. It was noticeable that she met the parental eye without blushing. Enquiry was started; the waiting-woman was questioned; the gallant himself made a courteous avowal that he had postponed till a more ceremonious occasion the assertion of his indubitable rights. He kissed his hand metaphorically to the mistress of his heart, retiring behind iron doors for the space of two years. The period was long enough to give the lady's family time to act on hopes destined cruelly

to be realised. Supported by certain certificates, proof up to the hilt, a private bill was brought into Parliament and passed, annulling the fly-away marriage. Being a minor the poor girl was left without voice in the matter, and deprived willy-nilly of the man of her heart. Pathetically ignorant to the last as to how her lover's generous scruples had betrayed her, she returned to school and spinsterhood, and became five years afterwards the wife of Sir Cooper Petwyn, a man willing, for the sake of compensations, to take over the victim of a dead romance. Thus Lady Petwyn went to her living tomb.

She told Tristram the tale with a dry relish, ironic to the last: yet with her own fate had not quite reached the end of her story. After her parent's death, being then tied up in decent matrimony, she became the mistress of her own property, and was minded to override such things as private acts of Parliament. Thus she finished her story: —

"I saw myself free to be my own mistress — and his. A year or two of Bones had sufficed to make me feel under no bonds. Off I went to discover my true mate; hunted, and found him. I had no illusion or romance then. Yet there was a mutual something between us. I knew to my cost that there was loyalty in him. Poor rogue! to pass the time, perhaps to rid himself of a momentary embarrassment, he had married a mere anybody, and between them the precarious couple had come by a baby. The event proved that no life lay in it. I never saw so disappointed a face as his when he found what he had missed for lack of a little patience. Words stopped: we recognised each other's meaning: seeing that new bonds were uppermost, silence was the best medicine for our chagrin.

"I saw the wife: a good little thing, cut out to be the drudge of a brilliant ne'er-do-weel. His truth to her was

foolish and touching; there was so little need for it; and he pitied himself so hugely!

"I never saw them again; but it pleased me to dribble out a dole to that poor domestic squaw about which he was to know nothing. It gave him an easier conscience to see that, whatever he did or didn't do for her, she had food enough for her mouth, and a roof over her head. He ambled about, wit, buffoon, and odd-corner man to gay circles; I don't know what he did to avoid making a living, I should doubt whether he kept honest. It took him twenty years to catch his death, the one thing he proved slow over. When he was dying in his own way, I suppose his wife got soft-hearted and blabbed my name. A child had turned up to them absurdly just at the last, and the poor woman's betrayal of my finger in their pie set him naming the thing after me. She sent me word of it in black edges — I was a widow and a godmother in one; also a puppy he had the training of. It came by his last orders, with his grateful respects, I was to be told. That was poor Billy: the dog only survived his master two years. Bones! bones! bones! there's three of them to think about!"

Tristram had not a face he could decently show. She looked at him curiously. "I'm glad it can make somebody snivel," she said; "it never did me! To me it's all dead history; there isn't an ounce of sentiment left in me."

And Tristram, with his heart raging for the pity of the romance which had fallen from those dry lips, was ready with youth's credulity to take her word for it!

He had some reason to believe in her general hardness of heart: he had talked to her of Cob's Hole, a disgrace to any property, and had been scornfully chaffed for his pains. It was then she had bid him quit scavenging. "Those hovels," said she, "are merely what the people

have made of them. Were I to spend two thousand pounds and set up model dwellings in their places, before three years were over they would be human pig-sties once more. When your labourer lives less like a beast it will be time enough to think of housing him." That was her last word as regards practical reform; the rest was chaff of Tristram, high-horsed on theories drawn from the books of his beloved Sage. "I hear that your source of wisdom has gone dotty," she said ruthlessly.

The Tramp, hearing rumour of it elsewhere, went over to the dear man's abode, and was told of illness in the room over his head; the faithful housekeeper's grief grew fresh as she spoke of it. The boy begged leave to go and stand by the Sage's door for a moment. He called through softly, sending his love, and heard within a frail voice that rambled. It seemed to wither and make unsubstantial all his raw dreams for the help of his fellow-man, flawing the structure of his first scheme of morality.

Trudging home tired and dispirited from that errand, he got cheer in meeting Lizzie Haycraft carrying her week's laundry down to the Vicarage. She bore it on her head proudly, high-stepping, a dark gipsy beauty; other girls laughed at her as she went by, for so outlandish a mode of carrying her burden. To Tristram it gave her so fine an air, he would not spoil it by any offer to share the load. It satisfied his theories that England could still produce such women from her lowliest classes; by the strength of such maidenhood she could still be a mother of nations.

Lizzie told him of Ray's unexpected return home. Hurrying to the unlooked-for encounter he found his friend gloriously bronzed and well, laid up with an athletic malady, his arm in a sling, and defiantly cheerful under discomfort. Three weeks' anticipation of the term's end seemed good pay for a put-out shoulder.

During the companionable weeks following, Marcia fell into line, consenting even to be one in excursions through the Hill Alwyn demesne. Tristram, perceiving that Ray was no longer one of her absurd jealousies, sucked the sweets of this new harmony, for coldness among his friends was a slight to his happy instinct for selection. Pleased to see that one shadow had passed, he was aware that Lady Petwyn still lay outside Marcia's pale of charity. It was an amusing situation, therefore, when one day the dame rode in on them, nodded to the two youths, and reaching out a cordial hand took Marcia's, saying, "So you are the Tramp's sister? We must be better acquainted."

All the way home Marcia carried in her eye a light of opposition. The jealous demon it seemed was not dead in her.

CHAPTER XIX

A FALL RASHLY REPENTED

AT the fag end of a three months' idleness Raymond found time lying heavily on his hands. Circumstances deprived him of the companionship which had made many long holidays spin merrily; the Tramp was away with mother and sister tanning himself in sea-breezes and the wash of tides that brought to him a memory of blue eyes. There, on a sunny slope high over the bay, Doris's name marked the place of her enduring exile.

Raymond had not Tristram's knack of busying himself with solitude, and now, being left to his own resources, the dread of being involved in parochial interests as a preliminary training to the "call" which was to come upon him with ordination, kept him adrift early and late from the paternal roof.

"I a parson!" At sound of the church-bell each morning the thought shocked him out of sleep, to the knowledge that his father was already up reciting matins for an absent parish. The parental example before his eyes made him shame-faced over his intended vocation; yet affection compromised him into silence. Only once had he broached the subject directly, in order to express doubts of himself. His father commended them, and passed them by. Had he, was the main question, doubts that touched critically to the root of things? The good,

equable youth could declare he had none, and so answering, saw the other's mind forthwith set at rest. Protesting himself not good enough, he spoke to a benevolent blank wall. "The best of us are unworthy," said his father, and gave him a priest's book of private devotions to keep by his pillow.

The two were excellent friends, but shy in communication with each other; to his father alone of all men Raymond was conscious of deceit and eye-service. He spoke of him to Tristram with easy affection, and would have run to the world's end to express his gratitude for the hundred and one absent-minded kindnesses which had smoothed their relations through life. To "keep square" was to Raymond's mind the filial debt which he owed, but his endeavours to do so never drew him into confidential intimacy with the one whose approval he sought. Thus it was that, when the neighbourhood of Little Alwyn set up an irritation in his moral system, the poor fellow, with his father at hand, discovered himself lonely. Tristram, his absurd gallivanting junior, was the medicine his soul missed. He found himself quitting home in fits and starts — away on a round of visits to acquaintances and relatives, only to return in haste. For the cure to be of any effect it must be found on the same spot where the malady existed. Rushing to study his disease again at closer quarters, he discerned fresh symptoms that amazed him by their intensity. In the grip of fresh irresolution, he shook his head savagely; cursed himself honestly for a fool and a worse thing still, and with that salve to his conscience became all the more entangled.

Flight up to town itself failed also to give the counter-distraction he needed. He came back again after a few days' absence, and was seen gun in hand roaming through fields where little game was to be had, where he was as

like to find mushrooms as partridges. At other times a yet more solitary mood caught him: he took to roving Randogger empty-handed, an idle young giant with no trees to fell.

The matter was quite an ordinary one; but the novelty of this, the first attack, set Raymond plunging. To the energies of a big breezy machine of a body, that bore him involuntarily to strenuous trials of a sound constitution, he coupled a minimum of philosophy. Days were when he chased like a hunter on a false trail, fooled by his game; then, again, would protest his indifference and fever himself under forced inactivity. He groaned and set his teeth; held on, only to let go; took fire once again for the quest, applied bellows to the flame, flagged, beat himself with opprobrious epithets — and was where he had been before. Never was so much waste to so little purpose, as in this his first conscious fight with himself, one wherein English youth is characteristically lonely. Tristram on such matters had already his high theories, and was beginning to mouth them: Ray had none. The blood, boots, and bones of beefy manhood took him afield early and late, but found him no cure beneath the sky.

With a mingled feeling of discontent and relief he saw himself at last with only one day's more freedom; he was due at Oxford again on the morrow. Having but a few hours in hand to make or mar, he let the fever in his feet carry him a likely way.

Under the red flanks of Quarry Wood, he saw, up amid the nut-bushes that crowned the impossible ascent, an abrupt ruffling among the leaves. Before long he had glimpsed a blue print gown, and an arm busy crooking down the green cluster. So sighting the very thing he had sought, he called it Fate; and skirting the quarries to a place where footing became possible, bolted up the ascent.

He reached the crest breathless, and pushed his way through a thick screen of branches, to the spot where he saw the picker at work. Her figure stood in dusk against the clear daylight behind, laced over by a lattice-like pattern of boughs and leaves. Below lay a wide landscape, wooded and pastoral, already tinting into golden decay; while picture-like between the bend of her arm and her side, showed a group of red cattle grazing over a distant hill. So scaled the girl's form stood out large and impressive amid its surroundings; she seemed a Pomona of the woods, a goddess run free, making the wilds her home.

She paid no heed at all to the youth's approach, till the disingenuous "Hullo, Liz!" of his surprise at finding her bade her know that her solitude was invaded. Thereat her head went round with a slow gesture of unwelcoming recognition. She returned his gaze, not his salutation; and while her hands continued to ply their task, went on eyeing him with a quiet air of enquiry.

When a maid is nut-harvesting a man may lend hands and play at lightening her task for her. However much she might look to question his coming, Raymond showed no embarrassment in holding his ground. He gathered, and threw his handfuls into the pouch that depended from her waist, till to mix fingers over the same bough became the natural thing.

"It's a warm day, Liz!" he observed presently. She answered, "Yes," and picked on. If his choice was to stay, hers was to go on with her work. As she moved independently he followed her from bush to bush, with a mind divided between restraint and avowal, cudgelling his wits for speech.

"Liz," he began at length, with stress of tone, "I saw you from down yonder; that's why I came. You didn't see me?"

"I wasn't looking behind me," she answered.

He reached across, and dropped more nuts into her pannier. "You know I'm off to-morrow?" he pursued urgently.

She nodded. "They told me that when I was over yesterday. You'll be wanting your things ready. They'll be down the first thing in the morning."

"You know I'm not thinking about them!" said Raymond.

"Maybe not," replied the girl.

"You know what I *am* thinking of?"

"Maybe I do: I don't ask 'e to say?"

"I *will* say!" cried Raymond, getting hot.

"As you please," she answered, and plucked fast and hard. She worked, smothered under nuttage and leaves, the rough clusters rubbing against her face. Suddenly, the youth's hands parted the covering, "Liz, my beauty! Oh, Liz!" he cried, his lips reaching forward for hers. They brushed retreating sweetness.

For a moment he saw only her reddened visage drawn back angrily with a gesture of disdain. Unaccountably it changed. Her eyes opened wide, full of horrid interrogating surprise: she slipped bodily from his view; in her place he beheld sky. The bough her hand had released flew across and fetched him a buffet over the face; it left him blind for an instant to the thing that was happening.

Lizzie's free-limbed movement quickened by anger had carried her further than her reckoning. For one moment she felt herself standing clear of the bushes; in another her feet had given way on leathery turf; she was down.

Horrified, but without a cry, she found herself still falling. Her hands went out to catch at grass that snapped or came away whole from a shallow soil. Nothing checked the decisive impetus of her descent. Her feet came over

a sheer edge; slipped as from land; broke the crumbling rim of earth that held them to life. She felt herself horribly sucked to the gulf of space below; up overhead light nut boughs bobbed in the wind, airy hand-holds, not one within reach.

So Raymond caught sight of her, already half-lost, on the utter verge of a slope where his feet could find no standing. Yet had the attempt been rank folly, he would still have gone after her. His hand, by instinct, got hold of the one chance of safety for both — the forked ends of a far-leaning bough; with that he sprang and slid the incline, crying out to her to lay hands on him. Not a moment too soon his feet shot into her reach; she caught him by ankle and shin, and clung, on the very edge of death. He was the chain that held her to life, he! — she clasped him with that at her heart.

With limbs sensitive to the crisis of the moment she shook horribly, and felt bound, powerless to stir. Her knees quailed as the earth gave under them.

"I am going to let go!" she murmured.

His voice above her said, "No!" and "If you loose, Liz, I go too!"

She clung the harder for that, but could not move. Her breast tugged for air, and relapsed in harsh sobbings — a pitiful sound. Ray spoke to give her comfort, hardly reckoning what he said. She held on and on.

"Have pluck, then you'll feel safer!" he told her. "You are quite safe so long as you hold on to me." Presently he called, "Bring yourself a little higher, then you can take hold of my hand!"

Her mind obeying his word of command began to recover its faculties. She looked up to see on what link he and she hung together in life, and recognised by how hazardous a thread their being depended. Raymond lay on his back, one hand stretched over his head had hold of

a few leafy stems; not so much as a main branch held their weight.

The sight strung her to action. With the thought, "If one of those give way, I must loose," she struggled to bring her knees across the brink of soil which continually gave under them. Succeeding after a while, and relieved of the lower strain, her hands began to creep upwards; gaining inch by inch, at last she held him by the knees. His free hand reaching down, caught and gave her a full hoist, so high that she was drawn clear of the abyss, and could dig temporary foothold for herself in the recovered ground.

After that, though the position was scarcely a comfortable one for unstrung nerves, the real peril was over; she needed but to regain strength before mounting the remainder of the slope by her companion's aid. At once she became weak again, and lay sobbing with her head against his knee, having scarcely the will to move. So long as she had hung suspended over death Raymond had been to her no more than an instrument, a rope or pole thrust for her deliverance. Now her hand lay in his, a mutual thankfulness thrilled them both; shame and pride inextricably mingled made bonds between them. She closed her eyes in a vain attempt to recover possession of her soul.

Raymond began to speak; she could not defend her ears, but must hear her deliverer give himself all the bitter blame he deserved. To let him do so at all seemed to her now ingratitude.

To his prayer for forgiveness, "Don't speak of it!" she whispered, "don't ever!"

"But I must!" he insisted, and was selfish, pushing his claim for the word to be spoken. "Just think, Liz," he urged, "supposing you had gone, it would have been my doing!"

"But you didn't, Mr. Raymond; you saved my life. Remember that, no need to mind about the rest! It was folly; you didn't mean nothing."

"Eh, my girl, but I did," said Raymond, unwilling to have that particular fault made light of. "I meant a good deal — a deuced sight too much, and that's the truth!"

She said no more for the moment. Raymond, beginning to realise the cramping strain of his position, gave forth a groan of lenient complaint. Getting his hand in under her arm, "Up with you!" he cried, "I am tired of dangling here like a pendulum. So!" and had her up on the slope beside him.

They sat looking over the place which a few moments before had promised them death. The sense that she was but just safe made him still hold her fast. He got sight then for the first time of her poor face, blanched and haggard with its emotions. The havoc wrought on her physical beauty woke in him a more lively contrition; he became a suitor for full and immediate pardon. "Poor Liz," he murmured, "poor dear Heart, call me a brute; it's what I am!"

She turned her face away, mounting a colour she wished him not to see.

He was urgent again to know whether she forgave him.

"There's naught to forgive!" she declared. "You done nothing; it was foolish of me to fling out as I did. And now, whatever you'd done, I'd have to forgive 'e, and be in your debt always. It's not a thing to be spoken of."

She ended by begging him to let her go. But for that their hearts are now too close; neither of them could act quite honestly: each spoke the word and stayed, irresolute to perform.

At length, to get herself free, she began gently to push off the hand which held her. In spite of the action, he saw pardon flowing to him out of her deep eyes. Her breath warmed his cheek as she made her first faint effort to escape; and, "Oh, Liz, Liz!" cried the youth, drawing breath over the fire within, and held her fast.

"Let me go, let me go," she whimpered; and sighed blissfully to feel his clasp tighten at the word.

The man in him moaned like an animal getting free of its pain. Crying, "I love you!" he believed deeply then the truth of his word.

"Let me go! let me go!" she answered, testing the strength of the chain that kept her his prisoner.

"Show me you forgive me!" cried Ray; "then I will."

"I do, I do!"

"Make me believe it!"

She moved her head hopelessly about, with eyes that said "Take" plainly enough. "Give!" she saw, was the demand made by his.

"Dear girl, what was it you wouldn't give me just now?" he taxed her to say. "Why did you jump down here with me after you?"

She sighed, yielding her defences one by one.

"You didn't mean nothing then," she said.

"I did; and I mean it more than ever now!"

"What?" she murmured, and threw back her head to drink in the light of day through half-shut lids. From the blue communing of heaven, her eyes fell back upon her lover's face.

"Just this!" he sent word to her ear, "that I love you best of all the women in this world. *Love* you! — there you have it, Liz! — so much, that if you had gone over, over I'd have gone too; and if that hadn't done for me, I'd have been a miserable wretch to the end of my days! Just a kiss, Liz! Two! What'll you give me?"

"Oh, that's all foolishness," muttered the girl, but laid all at once a face of crimson down by his. "Take 'em," she whispered, "take 'em, Mr. Raymond, but never tell me no lies! 'Twas bound to be so. You love me just for a bit; but you I love worse than well. I've knowed that all along!"

Raymond gathered her to him, surprised by the passion of her face in its surrender. She seemed a new woman, uplifted by the pure effort of her heart to show him its love. Conceiving dimly something in her nature transcending his, he felt a shame lest her eyes should discern the shortcomings he knew. He urged his tongue to speak flattery to her ears — self-flattery to his own also; for a man's passions win the credulous hearing of his heart.

"Ah, Liz," he sighed, "it's easy for a woman to talk! You can't tell how I love you; for it's certain I can't tell myself. You only see a corner of it all."

She covered his lips with her cheek to keep them from words. "Don't 'e tell me no lies," she whispered again; "I can think you love me well enough so long as you don't speak it; and that's good enough: — all I can ever want or hope."

She felt the protest his lips made. "No, no, Mr. Raymond!" she cried, and drew herself away from him, "you can never love me as I do you, not if I was to save your life fifty times, you couldn't do it. That's no lie I'm telling you."

"Save it and see," said Raymond, and had her fast once more. "See now! Which kisses best, you or I?"

But from the midst of his embrace she held herself back, and gazed long into his eyes; and at the end of the scrutiny, turned her head and looked away from him. She had too much common-sense to be deceived by such signs.

Raymond felt a chill. Somehow she judged him; her

very humility accused him and set her higher than it could please his conscience to feel. His eyes, too, went out with hers across the fields, dotted over with the slow-moving incidents of rustic life; through the green and the gold, foot-tracks showed in thin lines making toward the road that led on to Little Alwyn; field and wood, all ways converged to that end.

Presently his attention became fixed on a dark figure moving at a busy and earnest pace along the nearest field-path, the black-frocked figure of a man un-native to its surroundings; solitary, and a little foolish he seemed to the young man's eye.

The pedestrian had traversed over a hundred yards before Raymond broke silence; he spoke with effort: —

"Liz, look out there!" He nodded her to the object of his regards. "There goes a good man!" said he; "one who believes his son is going to be a parson like himself. If he could look up here, what would he think now?"

"Maybe the truth," said Lizzie, "that the world's a foolish place to preach in." Together they stared at the stooped form ambling in black, a dense preoccupied figure of a man.

"You think that is the truth?" queried Raymond, and got himself up from the turf. Lizzie rose too, and stood at his side: neither looked at the other. After a long silence Raymond spoke.

"Liz," he said, "I'm a devil of a fool; have been, I mean. You know what I want to say."

"If I know," she answered, "why say it?"

"I will; truth is better said out. Look here! I'm off to-morrow. We — we shan't forget each other in a hurry, shall we, Liz? You are a good girl, I swear it! As good as they make 'em. We — I — oh, hang it! — say good-bye, Liz, but don't look at me! I'm off; that's all about

it!" He turned his back abruptly, crying, "Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Mr. Raymond," said the girl, and without another word reached back her hands to the nutting. He did not see her face. So they parted. Raymond ran.

He was but halfway down the declivity out of the wood when his movements underwent a sharp change. He turned and raced back to the nut-coppice with more speed than he had left it a moment before, the lover conquering.

"Liz, Liz!" he called. Her place was vacant. "Liz!" Distant echoes answered him. He searched the wood over but could not find her. She was away — lost to him, it seemed, by a momentary lapse into the unnatural man. Morals then to the youth seemed a very utter folly.

CHAPTER XX

BOOTS LEAD A DANCE AT HILL ALWYN

SO, when the Tramp returned home in the late autumn, history of which he knew nothing had been shaping behind his back. Brief history, it is true, and showing at first sight a negative aspect, an undoing rather than a doing of the mischief devised by fate. Yet there is some significance, if you think of it, when fain wooer and fain wooed, the masterful and the mastered, without any fixed principle to go by, consent to the thwarting impulse of a moment, destined thereafter to drag out a sorry repentance.

Raymond schooled his bewildered chagrin under a grudging acceptance of the moral aspect which had obtruded in so unwelcome a fashion. The thing he had done seemed so out of character he could scarcely regard it as his own action; nor did separation do anything to reconcile him to the act he had been in such haste to recall. Now that he had let the girl go he felt himself all the more drawn by the wild woodland enchantment her beauty had for him. The world recks little of the keen repentance that follows upon some of our most correct actions.

Lizzie submitted more easily to a separation which came not of her own initiation; having once declared its passion, her more chaste nature stood quiescent, attendant on a stronger will. In other hands now lay the decision

of her future: she was there, if her lover should ever choose to return to her.

Her common sense bade her not think of it. To have won so much of Raymond's regard, despite their relative stations, was a memory she could be proud of; and the sudden scruple which had led to his abrupt leave-taking had but enhanced the value of the expression. She could honour the act that left her desolate; prizing him, and setting more store on his passion from the very fact that he had torn their two inclinations in twain. The difference in their two natures drew them to make opposite sacrifices: she was ready in faithful service to risk anything: he, by a momentary impulse of self-restraint, had proved that his passion held unexpected grains of good. With loyal silence she had given him the quittance he demanded; her laurels were the release she had been quick to render him. "Liz! Liz!" he had called, and she had not answered.

Tristram's first meeting with the girl on his return befell at an opportune moment. On the right-of-way footpath across the Hill Alwyn property he heard high voices ahead of him, and presently recognised the disputants. Lizzie came up to him with a high head and a flushed face, quitting the enforced company of MacAllister. The unwelcome encounter was not by any means the first she had had to put up with, but of that Tristram knew nothing. Lizzie herself disdained to state her cause for complaint; while Tristram, for his part, took the evidence his eyes afforded, forbearing to ask questions.

He gave MacAllister the curtest of salutations and marched past him, strutting somewhat consciously, a squire of beauty in distress.

The MacAllister, left to his own meditations, looked after the couple with something more than suspicion, and snuffed a tainted air. Fist down on palm registered con

viction of a new reason for hatred between him and Tristram. Within a week a bloody head got from a knock behind on a dark night precipitated him into further insane suspicions utterly wide of the mark. A neighbourhood that bred poachers gave cover also to released gaol-birds, between whom and a prosecuting bailiff grudges had occasionally to be paid off. MacAllister's vindictive and hasty temper, however, lighted forthwith on the provocation that lay nearest; so, beholding himself with a bruised head, he took woman to be its cause, and let his mind run naturally towards the one who had proved most kittle in her receipt of his attentions. From that hour he had his nose down on the fancied scent, pursuing a double vengeance along a single trail.

Through this slight incident Tristram came to be involved, without knowing it, in the workings of a drama whose mainsprings lay hidden from his sight, and to act a leading part in the play of other folks' passions: a curious fate for one who was not lacking in wilful initiative of his own. Here in his career his history begins to be secondary to that of other people, till his faculty for meddling brings him to fresh catastrophe. You that disapprove of him have but to wait to see his self-destructive instincts bringing him to the fore again.

Just at the beginning of winter rumours went about that Hill Alwyn was in commotion: maids twittering with hysterics, grooms actually giving notice to quit, my lady in high dudgeon back from town to know what the meaning of it all was. A scaring tale was told her.

On the evening of her return she sent a man over for Tristram, with a horse to ensure his speedier arrival. He came in by the stable-entrance.

"Seen Bones?" was her first word of greeting to him on entrance. She thumped her fist up and down in wrath, and bewildered him by a plunge into the centre of things

concerning which he had not even the beginnings of knowledge.

"He's trying to turn me out of the place, as though I hadn't paid for it!" she started to cry in high tones. "Who? — why, Bones, of course! If he goes on with it I'll have his monument hauled down over his head; he shall have green grass to lie under, and thank himself for the scandal it'll make!"

The Tramp begged to be told what had happened; the dame let him hear her end of it. Word had come up to her in town that two stablemen and the coachman were bent on leaving, and pending release would not go into the stables after dark; that all the women were squealing themselves into hysterics, gratuitously gluing their faces night by night to windows looking out over the kennels; and that no less than five top-boots had been seen standing in the yard and agitating themselves in a singular manner for empty ones.

"Top-boots?" queried Tristram, with his mind back into history.

"Alive and kicking," the lady asserted them to be. "It's poor Billy he's after," she said. "Don't tell me it's repentance; none of your Doctor Johnsons standing bare-headed in the rain at Lichfield! If that were his state of mind he wouldn't be kicking his toes out rehearsing the job. No! he does it to drive me out and get the Cooper-Petwyn crew in again. Family pride was always his next strongest point after drink; he always let me know he'd married beneath him."

"Very well," she went on, arguing into air, "to-morrow my lawyer comes, and I make my will! After that he may kick till Doomsday; his family shan't profit!"

It was apparent that hatred had swallowed up the lady's common sense.

Tristram said, "Have you seen the thing yourself?"

"I'm going to!" she answered. "That's what I've come down from town to do. If five fools have seen it why shouldn't I?"

She ordered the household to bed, and made Tristram keep her company at a back-window to past midnight. To while away the time he talked till she bade him not chatter; in the silence that ensued she snapped at every least sound like a terrier for rats: animosity not fear set her trembling by fits; she had hold of the boy's hand. Nothing at all happened.

She declared this to be his fault, and when the regulation hour was well over dismissed him as unprofitable to her purpose. Letting himself out of the dim hollow-sounding house he went off, part for curiosity and part for bravado, by way of the stables, and looking up saw the implacable grey face still staring out at the night. She shook her head at him savagely, waving him off as though he were in the way of the ghostly manifestation. Leaving her there was pathetic and grotesque enough; she, not the ghost, haunted him. A woman with a past she was indeed!

The event gave him a strange corner of her mind to look into. If the Cooper-Petwyns got word of it they would hardly account her sane. He wondered how a will would stand made under such circumstances.

A few days afterwards old Haycraft chuckled to Tristram of the rumour that had reached him.

"Lord, Lord!" he said, "it's wonderful what a little the gentry do know! Them boots be a sight older than the Bar'net — a hundred years and more. Folks a' forgot 'em; they bin seen so seldom of late years. I seen 'em though; saw 'em when I was a boy."

He told Tristram the true story.

From time immemorial, before there was a house at Hill Alwyn, there were kennels and stables. One Harrop,

a crusty devil by all accounts and a brute to his beasts, was huntsman at a date near the middle of the eighteenth century. He trained his pack on the empty-stomach system, and was an all-round hard disciplinarian. One night in early December there was a great noise up at the kennels; possibly a fox had skulked by and left scent of himself to his would-be eaters. Anyway, a very madness of excitement took hold of the whole pack; the din of it came down to the huntsman's cottage about the hour when he was making ready for bed. Making ready for bed with him was by way of the brown jug. He got up from his liquor with a curse, and stumbled out into darkness, whip in hand.

Next morning his top-boots only were found, lying torn and bloody against the doors of the kennels, and all the hounds were on rampage fairly ravening. Those who saw them got a horror over the sight; they were let forth one by one and shot.

A true story, Haycraft averred; and scoffed that a gang of town menials should live in the place and not know of it. After the tragedy the boots walked steadily for some years, till the cottage was pulled down and the house built over its site. That seemed to give a check to the clock-like regularity of the ghostly pedestrian; but at times the old uneasy spirit re-asserted itself, and boots were to be seen up at the kennels doing the same dance as formerly.

"One man did tell me," said Haycraft, "that he saw 'em the year Sir Cooper died; — just before he died, that would be. As to that I can't say, I was elsewhere in those days; but they do say always that it's a token of evil to come; twice it have been followed by the death of a Master of the Tavishires, that being when he happened to be one of the family. 'Tis a bad sign, anyway."

Tristram called to mind Lady Petwyn's gloomy forebodings about herself, and her talk of making a will, and

questioned whether to tell her or no. He did so, only to rouse her into wrath at being robbed of the feud toward which her heart had kindled a malignant welcome. "And I've made my will," she said, as though it had become wasted labour. She flourished in his face a threat to burn it; and when he saw no reason why not, if the thought of the thing done displeased her, called him jackanapes and fool.

At the beginning of December young Aubrey Cooper-Petwyn, the least disliked of her numerous heirs presumptive, came to stay for a couple of weeks, and broke his neck in the hunting-field through sheer bad riding. Lady Petwyn harped on that fact, to wither her pity for a young man cut off in his prime.

"I couldn't have trusted my horses to *him*," she said. "A gentleman's first duty is to know how to ride."

She let Tristram understand that he owed her thanks for that initiation. He had been present when the accident occurred, and went over as Lady Petwyn's representative to attend the poor lad's funeral. He found himself curiously eyed by the relatives among whom he had come on an errand of sympathy. They remained cold; and left him, an eye-witness, unquestioned for details of the lamentable event, and unthanked for his presence. He was forced to suppose that they blamed Lady Petwyn, notorious for her reckless riding, and let a shadow of their minds in the matter fall upon him, her emissary.

A kindly feeling prompted the dame to be absent from the next meet of the season. Regarding one abstinence as a sufficient sop to conventions she disrespected, she undid the good by being present at the meet following. Word went of it, and the whole house of Cooper-Petwyn, Cooper and Co. bristled at the news. "They write to me with porcupine quills," she told Tristram, "on paper with black phylacteries double-breadth! Am I to be cooped up

a whole season because they couldn't teach a poor, foolish boy how to ride properly?" She nagged to quiet her conscience; for it was quite true that she had led the youth to the jump that landed him in eternity.

As a consequence she demanded much of Tristram's time to keep her amused, and wanted to know one day why she always saw him in a hurry, with his nose pointing west.

He told her of Ben Haycraft smitten down under the rigours of winter and approaching age; Lizzie, single-handed, and so, house-bound, unable to do the necessary marketings, or procure for the sick man the extra comforts he required; only not driven to be bread-winner as well, for the old rascal had his store, and could afford to be frostbitten for a while without fear of lean poverty.

Beholding him much concerned, the lady doubted whether the youth's errand was one of pure philanthropy; pious philandering rather, she suspected it to be, and encouraged it with promises of beef-tea and wine if Tristram would trouble to come over and fetch them. One day she added a bundle of blankets, and saw him carry off the huge ungainly parcel without a suspicion that he was being laughed at.

She was more puzzled when Christmas came to find Raymond impressed into the same service, and just as hot on it. "Young men didn't play at district-visiting and parish-nursing in my day!" she remarked; and supposed that among poachers blood was thicker than water in some special degree.

It was by the old man's bed that Raymond and Lizzie set eyes on each other again. The circumstances sealed the compact of silence between them; after many visits the young man had not even the touch of her hands to judge by. Her call for any to enter who knocked saved her from coming to the door to meet him; and from her

eyes he could read nothing but gratitude for immediate services.

Under their combined efforts Haycraft was cooked and coddled through the worst part of the winter, and a charmingly disreputable character saved to the neighbourhood. On the first pick-up of his strength the old man hankered for a taste of his own game, much as did Isaac for his son's venison. Together the two friends went out and foraged the leafless cover: often keeping afield when reward was scanty, and waiting freezing work. For the mere sound of their shooting, coming down to him from his own coppice, brought a queer satisfaction to the sick man's ear; the passion of the chase infected his blood; the thought that his "two young gen'lemen were at it" whiled away the hours. Lizzie declared that nothing did him so much good.

Tristram marched off a brace of her own pheasants to Lady Petwyn one day, and made her purchase them for the sake of the old poacher lying ill. The impertinence of it pleased her vastly; she invited him to go further and try the same game on MacAllister, and saw his brow go a little black over the pleasantry. It was plain that the youth's genial heart contained its dark spot of irreconcilable dislike.

She taxed him with an ungenerous harbouring of old grudges. Tristram said he hoped he could like a mere enemy, if that were all; but some characters he could not. MacAllister, he declared, was an ill beast, giving his employer also an ill name in the neighbourhood.

"Not the only woman he does that for, I'm told," replied the outrageous dame, indicating a hearty tolerance for any male who had the wits to be successful with the fools and frauds of creation. She prided herself on an utter lack of charity for her own sex; if not noodles, anglers she held them to be; when not calculating, then

miscalculating their fates. 'Twas either, "Where am I?" or, "Here I am!" when catastrophe came to them.

She had but to drop a few words of this sort to get Tristram noisy, and have her play with his raw theories. She listened, chaffed, avoided argument by calling him boy and child: from that dropped to babe; and finally told him not to be a prig.

"What is a prig?" he challenged her to explain.

She amused herself studying his hot face. "Something you are always trying to be and can't be!" she told him. "And the ambition makes you look foolish."

The gibe shut his mouth for the moment. Lady Petwyn's thought was, "Poor youth, what a cropper he will come some day when facts get hold of him!" and had in her mind's eye the particular petticoat that might render him that service. Nor had she the slightest intention of intervening to prevent the catastrophe.

When she sent bed-ridden Haycraft a good price for the return of her pheasants, there was little enough of charity in the deed.

CHAPTER XXI

BEMBRIDGE FAIR

LADY PETWYN was not destined to see ideal youth put upon trial, though during the year that followed, momentary twinges of the moral problem had hold of Tristram, telling round what corner there was capering to be done at the beck of the goat-shanked god. Now and again, some fumes of what reeked ahead blew over his senses; but to sniff and feel a smother is one thing, the actual scorching another. How an initial smoke-curing differs from the smelting-process is the discovery not of the 'teens but of the twenties. Had he come to her cobweb for a confessional, the dame could have pointed him a quicker way to the singeing she wished him; but her lures up to town with its sights of the gay world had no attraction as yet for the foolish youth, wise with the hand-to-mouth conceits of his age. One day she caught him reading the book of an American recluse: dipped into it herself, only to find it despairingly dull; and begged him not to be affected, pretending to a liking for such stuff. When he quoted pieces at her she concluded that prehistoric anarchy had infected his brain, and determined wisely to give him his run till this latest diet of prig-nuts, as she termed it, should be digested. Her reckoning gave a year for so much madness to come out of him.

Accepting her word for it he enlisted her services, to get him quick through with that particular folly. He

wanted one large helping of liberty before the bondage of the desk should swallow him into manhood's estate, and knew that a formal invitation from her would count for much with his father. She became a ready conspirator; an invitation for him to come and join a house-party at her place in Wales for part of the ensuing summer and autumn had the right sound about it. Consent being obtained, July, with two months to follow, was the date fixed. Then he was to start off and play the fool in his own way on territory Lady Petwyn would supply, she claiming the right to come at intervals and contemplate his hark-back into savagery.

When the invitation came down in state to be read by his elders, Tristram saw Marcia's wise-acre eyes looking at him, and knew himself spotted; she had a feline instinct for all the rat-runs that abounded on his moral premises, without knowing quite where they led to. Never inquisitive, by sheer insight she compelled herself into his confidence. So, now when he said to her: "You and I will write to each other, Marcia," she knew she had him fast, and cared very little after that about his long absence under auspices she disapproved.

The date of his departure gave the Tramp time to be in Bembridge for the big annual orgie of pleasuring which shortly after midsummer made a vicious gathering of the whole rural activity of the district. St. Swithin was then called on to preside over a festival wherein his element played but a subsidiary part, unless he chanced to assert sovranly his pluvial influence, give a drenching to the whole spectacle, and make doubly miserable in their ditches along all the highways leading out of Bembridge the poor tipplers who had set forth with a *bonâ fide* hope of reaching home before morning. To these, and to others with them less reputably determined, the Saint would then prove a stern shepherd and bishop of souls;

but, as a rule, he gave the Devil his opportunity, and for a good three mile radius over a country-side on all other days peaceable and passable, the Devil took the same, and had helping and surfeit.

For the sake of its local colour, Tristram had a liking for the bucolic frenzy which then frothed itself to a head. Youth has a taste for all meats offered to idols, and the yeasting of a human mob will draw minds superior to sensibler excitements. He went down for the hurly-burly with Raymond, newly back from Oxford; and, even so early in the day, their ears caught the hubbub of the fair a mile before they came into the town. They overtook hastening groups; Tristram knew most of them; something of their clothes too, it would seem, for he threw the laughing compliment of "There's bunting!" and, "First time on!" to three girls trolloping along in fresh finery.

"Pretty'minxes," was his summing of them when they had passed. To Raymond's enquiry, Tristram had their names off pat; Emma, Jane, and Polly, maidens of ill-reputed parentage: Tilt by name, and Tilt by nature to the verge of actual spill and upset. "As fast as they grow up they become handfuls," said he. "Your father could tell you about them, I suspect: they must give him trouble enough."

Raymond gave an off-hand laugh. "You know about them too, it seems," said he. "Getting a bit of a handful yourself, eh?"

The Tramp was too light-witted to make much of the remark; he shrugged and laughed off into anecdote of the Tilt family, a centre of squabble and scandal to the Cob's Hole community; the father a hawker, often away; the mother immensely fat, a sedentary scold; would pull off her shoes and hurl them among the family with words as well, rather than rise up off her seat to deal chastisement. That was her method of discipline; from its exercise

Polly, the youngest, had gone to church with a black eye, boasting that in revenge she had put the shoe and its fellow into the pig's wash tub: an amusing, scurrilous breed, always noisy, very often disreputable. Tristram maintained they had their good points; undertaking their defence because of his friend, the hawker, a clever, plausible rogue, now in temporary retirement for a breach of the peace. He had come upon the fellow in his trampings, and had culled racy wisdom from his wayside experiences.

Reaching Bembridge they rounded a street-corner, and through an alley of elms came forthwith into a full view of the merry-making. The public green was already trampled out of recognition; wherever a gap showed, battened brown sod had taken the place of grass. Through a carpet-beating atmosphere, the crowd moved, swallowing the dust shaken up by its feet. Dull and fierce, the pursuits of pleasure and profit were urging side by side. With an air of unconscious docility the sight-seers went their rounds of the booths: the led herd baaed; the herders barked them from place to place. Brown gipsies, a sharp-eyed crew, rubbed shoulders with dull-faced bumpkins; fellows styled prize-fighters exhibited themselves before their tent in preliminary show of fisticuffs; showmen stood on tubs and waved; buxom sylphs in tights strutted on platforms and lolled over handrails; a surviving portion of a Bulgarian massacre coloured Midlothian rhetoric to the cold stare of an English crowd; weight-pounders smote the bolt that shot an indicator up a pole toward the just-attainable point where a bell waited to give tongue. Added to all these movements and sights went a villainous babel of sound: the crack of cocoanut-shying, the churning of steam and hand organs, the long-drawn whistles of merry-go-rounds, the squeals of tossing humanity in boats and swings, the popping of toy-rifles

at bell-targets, the hoarse yahing of quacks, clowns, and showmen; all the hideous uproar of forced business and mirth squeezed into the limits of a single day, for the violent exhaustion of dull wits, spewed over a madding populace.

Sight of some gipsies whom he recognised made Tristram wonder whether old Haycraft would be over to revive buried enmities and friendships out of an obscured past. Raymond answered for him, not: knew him to be away on a three days' ratting job the other side of Randogger. Lizzie then, left alone, was not likely to come either.

Tristram said, "I want to go and talk to some of that gang," and dragged Ray into a booth where drinking and eating were in progress. He astonished his friend by talking in a strange tongue to an old woman he found there. She, too, was disconcerted; she looked sharp and sly at him, and answered with some reserve, on hearing the speech of her tribe coming from a stranger.

"Where did you get that gibberish?" asked Raymond; but Tristram held it as the final prize of his intimacy with Haycraft, and refused to tell; he doubted whether any other knew that the old fellow had the gift, and was proud to have wheedled instruction out of him. In Romany, Haycraft had told him things not to be spoken in his mother-tongue.

Tristram got Raymond to give his palm to the old woman; his own she refused to look at, though silver lay in it. Ray listened indolently to the grey crone's gabble, but stood up sharp and turned a quick look on his friend when she spoke of a dark girl waiting to meet him. She bid him beware of another man, no friend to either of them; and added, after Raymond had drawn back his hand, "You've a long journey before you, my pretty gentleman; and a far-off land's where you'll have to live."

Her earnestness amused the Tramp, and he offered his hand once more for inspection. "I've seen you about Randogger," said he. She bade him repocket his coin and refused to have anything to do with him. As he was following Raymond out of the tent, she pulled him back. "When do you come to us?" she whispered. He answered in Romany, "When I do come shall I bring him along with me?" uttering a name that took her in midbreath. He went out and left her staring.

Later in the day some one plucked at him in the crowd. It was the old crone again. "Give him that," she said; thrust a small pouch into his hand and made off.

The Tramp had not a chance of seeing how Haycraft took it when it came to him; having to leave before the old man's return, he made Lizzie his medium for conveying it. Haycraft made no mention of it when they met again.

Before evening set in Raymond's interest in the fair was over; he declared for home, and before long was off. Tristram by then was among his farmer friends. He wished to get old Duffin off his liquor to come and see a fair, fat woman on view in one of the shows. "Poor old boy," said he, "I mean to find him a second wife; and a fat beauty's the shape for him." In the booth he had great fun with that sturdy specimen of an English yeoman, cheery and mellow from his cups; and dropped a sly bribe to the lady to fall on him and kiss him. She did, declaring he was the man she had waited for; her announcement that she was a widow with ten children, the eldest still growing, sent him out heart-whole amid the laughter of the onlookers.

Outside he turned on Tristram a reproachful eye, detecting the game to be his. "Muster Tristram," he said, "I ha'n't kissed a woman since I lost my poor wife three year ago come Michaelmas; and now you gone and done

it for me!" He declared it as though virtue had gone out of him in the process.

Tristram vowed it was a friendly act. "Your old woman," said he, "was too good a wife not to wish you comfortable in your old age; and that you're not, though you could be. There's three sighing for you that I know of to a certainty."

"Three? Lord, but you don't say *three?*" the old boy protested, his vast frame tickled through with vanity at the bare notion of it.

"Three for certain," answered the youth. "Give another the benefit of the doubt, I'd say four: — Bonny ones too! It's for you to find them out."

The hale old farmer slapped his thigh to hear of himself so much in request; he required but little pushing. The Tramp had caught him in the right mood.

"My poor wife 'ud wish it," he assented: "hearty, she would. She was a kind 'un."

"Not to be beaten!" Tristram cried, in praise to her memory. "You were a good trainer, Duffin."

The old man thanked him. Truth to tell, Tristram's trick had revived snuggling memories of comforts he had forgotten. Thanks to the youth, he carried away with him from Bembridge fair a notion that the gay dog was not dead in him yet; and there, before his recovered mind in the matter was a sure knowledge of what his Susan's emphatic wishes in the matter would be. Before the chills of winter came to make him once more a conscious bachelor, he had picked out for himself one of Tristram's imaginary three, a comely spinster well under forty; and marrying her, like Job in renewed prosperity, begat sons and daughters to give joy to him in his old age. It was little more than a year later that to the first of these, at his bidding, Tristram had fitly and properly to stand godfather. He did so then with a battered reputation, not altogether new to the office.

This great matter from a little fire has carried the narrative away from the day whose tale has still to be told; but we do well to follow up the Tramp's responsibility for sins as fast as he commits them, else we might never overtake them; and we must bear in mind that an elder's moral has to be spoken on the whole of his story. For this day, at least, there is no more evil to tell of him, though an event of some importance has yet to follow.

Inside his riotous hours the youth had a knack for a level calculation of events; mother-wit told him that Farmer Duffin's offer of a lift home in his cart when the clocks struck eleven was an hour later than his soul's welfare demanded. At ten, therefore, he got himself up from the company of more seasoned drinkers, bid a round dozen of good-nights, and escaped from a smoke-laden atmosphere to the purer heat of a breathless summer's night.

He skirted the broad fairground where revelry was now guttering down to its final flare, and by way of the elm avenue made for the quiet of open field spaces beyond. Entering the first of these, he came upon dancers, footing it in partial time to a couple of fiddlers who sawed, each with a will of his own, a portion of the same tune. The music was sufficiently precise for the legs that went to it; the dancers, so long as they could keep clasped, cared not what way they twirled, nor by what sounds accompanied. Wherever a group rested bottles went up and down: bottles without glasses, both sexes drinking alike, a sure sign that the polite picnic-stage had passed. The Tramp recognised several Alwyn and Hiddenden villagers among the groups; he picked his way through their midst, avoiding as best he could the dusky figures that swung this way and that across his path. Suddenly, from behind, a couple lurched into him; the man went down, dragging with him a torn

strip of white skirt; only the Tramp's arm saved his partner from sharing his fall.

"Go along, Tom, you're drunk," cried the girl, skittish and vexed. "I'll have no more of you; here's my gentleman!"

Tristram recognised the voice of Miss Polly Tilt. Hadn't he come on very purpose to dance with her? she asked him. Once round, he said, if she would promise to go home after it.

"Lor'! why, it's young Mr. Gavney!" she cried, fluttered at the discovery. "I'm sure, I do ask your pardon! but I was jest spoiling for a dance; and Tom, it's beyond 'im."

Tristram assured her she might have her dance if she wished for it. She giggled and hung on him with delight, declaring that it was like being a real lady to be danced by him. All at once she became coy, and wanted to know if any one was looking. "Why shouldn't they?" enquired Tristram, and without waiting for further argument spun her round the field on the outskirts of the bobbing multitude. "Lor', how beautiful you do dance!" she sighed from the shelter of his arm.

He halted her out of ear-shot of her companions to say, "Now, Polly, you've had your dance, be as good as your word and go home! Where are all the rest of you?"

She pouted, declaring herself left in the lurch; her sisters had gone off about their own devices, each with her young man.

"And what about yours?" asked Tristram. "Where's he?"

"Yon!" said the girl, pointing to the recumbent figure of her recently discharged partner. "That's mine; we took up las' Sunday; we done it o' purpose for the fair; and see what 'e's fit for now!"

Tristram hardly liked leaving her in the hands of such

a guardian at that hour, and on that night. A mere slip of a girl still, she had wild blood in her; was pretty too, a bit of a kitten; for the rest, a baggage. He was in doubt what to do. From her manner he could tell that she too had been drinking, and there would be more drink waiting wherever Tom was.

"I'll see you home," said he finally.

"You?" She grinned at the rank impropriety of the proposal. "Oh no! where'd my character be if I was seen going home at this time o' night along of a gentleman?"

"Very well," said Tristram, "you go on first, and I'll follow and keep an eye on you. You'll feel safe enough that way."

"Go along!" she said, "ye don't mean it. I'll get Tom."

She went across to her fallen swain and lugged him by the arm. "Come along, Tom," said she. "My new man says you got to take me 'ome. If you don't, 'e will, 'e says. So now ye know. I was asking ye to come half-an-hour ago."

The bumpkin thus addressed sat up, fuddled and truculent. "G'on!" said he at last. "You talk! who pushed me down 'ere?"

"You done it ye'self; you run ye'self and me slam into 'im, as 'e was comin' along."

"Oh yes, and who've you bin dauncin' with ever since? You bring 'un on 'ere; I'll gie 'un what for!"

He refused still to get up at her bidding, calling out for his rival to come and have his measure taken; wouldn't have anything more to do with her till he'd met the other man square.

Without further ado she loosed hold of him. "You must get 'im for ye'self then," she said. "Tell ye, I'm goin' 'ome now along of 'im."

She left her man sitting quite helpless, and cantered back to Tristram. "All right, Master," she said, "I be all ready to start. Tom's got too much liquor in 'im; 'e won't be home to-night, I know; I'll come! You got to go be'ind, though, if anybody's a-looking; I won't be seen along of you."

The Tramp took her at her word, letting her range ahead; so they started. When they got into the next field he saw that they were behind the hour when modesty should be abroad; human conduct was doffing its daylight disguise. Keeping his eyes straight he beheld Polly with unconcerned air roaming in front of him, head this way and that, a well-instructed child of Nature.

Beyond the next boundary she began to slacken her pace; Tristram did likewise. Finding that he measured his movements by hers, she sat down on the bar of the next stile to wait for him to come up.

"Now, Polly, get on with you!" he called, having a wish to step out fast and be rid of the ruck in which he found himself.

"I think I'll go back for Tom," she answered.

"Better not," Tristram advised her. "He won't be any the less off his legs when you get back to him."

"I'm going back, though," she repeated; "I don't like walking alone."

"You'll have to do the going back alone, then," he told her. "Settle that for yourself. I'm going on."

The girl sidled on her seat. "It's lonesome goin' like this," she said, "and I ought to go and see as nobody gets hold of 'im. I ain't kissed 'im. I ain't said good-night to 'im; and 'e's been spending a lot on me."

"Do that another time," suggested her companion.

"D'you want me to come along o' you, then?"

"It's quite the best thing you can do now."

"All right," said the girl. "Give me a kiss, and I will."

"I'll see you further first!" was his smart parry.

"Where to? Where are you going to take me?"

"Just to the near end of the village; you will be all right then."

The girl got up sullenly and walked on. Only one stile further, she sat down again to remark: "You've promised, 'aven't you?"

"Promised what?"

"When you've seen me further."

"So have you; you promised me you'd go home. Don't take all night about it!"

"All night? No, I've me character to think of. You think I 'aven't?"

"Walk, don't think!" said Tristram.

"My dress is torn," was her complaint; "it wants pinning, I can't reach it for myself."

He took the pins and did the thing for her. That operation concluded, she moved on at her own slow walking-rate.

"Won't you come alongside now?" she asked him presently. "There ain't nobody about."

"Oh, anything to get you on!" He took her arm and pushed to quicken her pace.

"Now, you are pinching!" she complained.

"I shall do it more, if you don't come faster."

She fell at once into a steady rallantando to lure him into an exercise of the force he had threatened.

He got her to walk at last by going ahead of her. Behind his back she started gabbling.

"Oh, my! it do make me laugh to think of it!" she declared. "Won't Emma and Jane be jealous when I tell 'em of this? They're both sweet on you; in church they looks at you through their 'ands, and under their 'ymnbooks out of the gallery, they do! Haven't ye ever looked up and caught 'em doin' it?"

Tristram said he would be on the look-out the next Sunday.

"Lor', you are good," she said, heaving a sigh, "going so reg'lar!"

"Plenty of people are good, if you go by that."

"I goes for the singing," she explained; "I feels good when a 'ymn's bein' sung. Don't you?"

"That's what the hymns are for," replied Tristram.

"But," continued the introspective damsel, "I feels just as bad again on the Monday. It don't carry one over the week."

"Not over fair-day, perhaps."

"And there's Mr. Raymond," she went on; "'e goes reg'lar too. Ain't he a beauty?"

"I'll tell him you say so," laughed her companion.

So, by humouring her in her talk, he got her at last to the point where, with a good conscience, he could leave her to her own devices. He turned then to bid her good-night, and without more ado was ridding her of his company. "Here you are home," said he.

She started whimpering at once, and put up a protesting face. "I'll not go; no, I'll not! So now then!" was her resolute avowal. "Not till you've give me what you promised. You've called me names all the way along, you 'ave! I know you meant to be nasty to me. You think I'm bad."

"I think you'd be better at home."

"Give me one, then, and I'll go!"

Tristram dropped her an indifferent brief salute. She smacked her lips in air, a fish missing its fly. "That don't count!" she declared.

"Polly," said the youth more soberly than he felt, "you've been very silly to-night. Now run along; you ought to be in bed!" He gave her a second peck to the fair cheek, and put her away from him.

"Call that a kiss?" cried the aggrieved damsel. "Why, you done it with your chin, you did! I ain't bad, I'm weak, just! A man might do anything with me if he only knew."

Tristram's second "Good-night" was decisive, coming with the sound of his departing footsteps.

"And he calls hisself a gentleman!" was Polly's quaint meditation as she arrived solitary at her own door, to find her mother already asleep and snoring, and her sisters not yet returned. Two miles away her derelict lover lay consoling himself in the field where the rasp of the fiddlers had ceased. Over Bembridge and the ashes of its feast, the sky leaned sultry and lowering; St. Swithin, with suspended purpose, hung a coppery black mantle across the night.

CHAPTER XXII

A CONFLICT OF THE ELEMENTS

AT the top of the first rise on his now solitary road, Tristram paused to gain the companionship of night. He began to take in deep breaths from a still atmosphere; the balm he sought was not there. A day of close contact with perspiring humanity, his evening's carouse with Farmer Duffin and his thirsty set, the circumstances of the way back from Bembridge, had laid a tarnish on body and soul which they were hard put to to shake off. Not a breath from the four quarters of heaven would come to his rescue. From where he stood he could see the glow-worm lights of Bembridge low down among the ridge of fields by which he had come, those fields so filled to-night with sunken humanity; a faint blare of music still came up from the town, to tell where the revelry was dying hard. His mind's eye carried him back to the scene he had quitted, where riotous flesh stood on its last leg and crowed against decent retirement and repose, and thence to the muffled field-path along which he and Polly had steered their way home. Something of the Bacchanal was in his nature, prompting him, when he saw others roll, to roll likewise; so, as he stood and looked back over these leavings and dregs of beast-man's entertainment of himself, things wrestled this way and that for the hot or cold possession of his mind.

Presently, with a laugh, he threw himself abruptly into action, and ran, turning his back on the lights of hamlet and town. Even the hedgerows on either side seemed to hamper his mood for free air. He leapt a fence, heard the swish of deep clover under his feet, and at last felt solitude.

Over the undulating obscurity ahead night flowed out to meet him; breathless she lay against his cheek, accompanying him as he ran. Far off he heard sounds of her — she was still there by his side.

Over the dubious horizon of woods to the north crept a faint suspicion of light; its ghostly passage did but deepen the sense of slumber in the mass which gave cover by day to so much song. Lone, and harshly interrogating, a night-bird here and there lifted its cry. A late cuckoo surprised him with one clear unbroken note, as though the night air were good for its voice, — a solitary, surely left over from its true month of song. The scent of recently stacked hay drew across in a sudden hot puff of wind from the slopes above. In the hollows pockets of cooler air waited to receive him; he dived and came out again. From a body strangely at home in the dubiousness of surrounding shadow, his senses put out hands to the oppressed and drowsy atmosphere.

Taking a short cut to his objective he leaped a high fence, and could hear presently the noise of water falling from the upper to the lower of the Hill Alwyn ponds, and the splash and rustle of disturbed water-fowl. The wood was heavy with the smell of the damp corrupt heat that had stagnated there through the day. As he entered its deepening archway the Tramp became aware that St. Swithin's attentions were imminent: above the lattice of boughs went a faint play of light, and he heard from a far distance a deeply muttered roll. A more conscious stillness seemed then to take hold of mother-earth, a listen-

ing for stealthy hands at work undoing the bolts and bars of her hushed dwelling.

Arrived at the lower pool where the water went deepest over a smooth bottom, Tristram pushed his way through high weeds and hazel, then over an oozy edge of bulrush till he reached the side of the boat-house. Without troubling over the door-hasp, he scrambled his way along the skirting, got his foot on to a pile beside the entrance, and by a dexterous push landed himself on the fore-part of the punt there moored. He pulled deep breaths, quite winded by the speed of his coming.

Within the shed hung pitchy blackness, obscuring entirely the two boats at the further end; under the zinc roof remained the close warmth of the day's heat; the proximity of water-weeds on the pond's surface permeated the shelter with a faint unclean odour. Without entering further the Tramp stood up on the beak of the punt and disrobed. To an observer from within his movements must have been easily apparent during the short minute occupied by the process; his slight athletic figure showed out dark against the deadened silver of waters midway between gloom and gleam, over which there passed now and then washes and flicks of a mysterious light.

Having reached the ultimate stage of naturalness, Tristram took footing on the extreme verge of his standing-place, drew himself high, arched, leaned, dipped over, and disappeared with a soft crash into the coolness below.

The water poured over him with welcoming rush as his body shot out from the bank; down he went and down; such delicious cold embraced him, he wished never to rise.

Suddenly, as he still dived, enchantment opened round him: all beneath him became vivid, illuminated, moving. Before his gaze the pool's bed was flicked by three sharp shocks of light; his eye took in ripple of weed, spectral

colour of darting fish, his own shadow frog-like and huge moving under him with antic gesture, a whole underworld alive with uncouth form, scattering away in panic motion as he charged.

Only for a moment; the vision vanished. He rose in time to hear the rattling tail of the thunder, and to feel the first huge drops of storm descending over the pond.

Antaeus had found his play-fellow. The rain lashed him over head and face as seeking to drown what remained of him in air; thunder battered its applause, lightnings came straight-hurled against the broad target of grey water that held him safe; in livid shocks the surrounding trees seemed to break out into green flame, and every rushing rain-drop to become a tongue of fire. On the island a single pine toppled and crashed down: Tristram beheld it, cleft from crest to base, and felt that for the first time he had seen thunder. He shouted and sang like a madman as he swam up and down in the splendour of the storm: a strange sound for ears that listened under cover of the rain-beaten wood.

Two, a man and a woman, stood watching the vertical mist of water that sheathed itself in the pond, crossed now and again by quick shuttles of fire; they could hear the bather's voice making uncanny music from the other side of the island; neither he nor the thunder seemed to tire. Vexation and amusement showed itself in the tones of the one who spoke first.

"What a scatter-brained devil it is! Just hark at the idiot!" said he.

"It's Mr. Tristram! Oh, if he sees us!" came from the other in a deeply troubled voice.

"He won't see us," said her companion, holding her hands fast. Still she wished at once to get away, and was urgent that they should start.

"How can we," he demanded, "in this rain? Move and you'll get drenched."

"No," she said, "I can't bear it; for us to be here, — and him. It 'ud hurt him; can't you feel what I mean? I wish we had never come!"

"What, sorry already?" his lips were sentinels over hers.

"No, no!" she pressed her face upon his. "I can't be that; not in the way you mean. But I am, I am! I feel, seeing him, that I've done you and him and myself a wrong. There'll be always something to hide now. That's what hurts me!"

"Good things have often to hide themselves in this world; it's a hard place, full of fools and hypocrites."

"He's neither," said the girl.

"Nor are you; nor am I more than I need be. Ah, come, come! You are my own girl, you know. Not in all the world is there another." He had her fast, and felt then the sobbing she had kept silent.

She clung close to protest her love while yet having another thing to say. "Oh, Ray, Ray, I love 'e!" she breathed, and had difficulty to get on. "It's this," she said at last, "I can't ever be sorry to have found you; you was my own man from the beginning; I can't never change. But I do know how it must end. I can on'y please 'e for a little while; there's not that in me to keep 'e true, though you may think it now! I know I've done wrong, though I can't ever repent of it. Do 'e remember that; don't ever blame yourself when the time comes!"

"You'll have to name the time, Liz, not I," said Raymond, and felt that he had spoken but a bare truth.

"Ah, no!" she cried, "it won't be, it can't be! Never, never!"

She drew his hand into her bosom. "Let us go!" she urged again.

Raymond yielded to her longing to get away, and accompanied her through the drenching thickets over which the rain still rattled, or broke past in sudden cascades. It seemed almost a drowned woman he held in his arms when they were parting at the narrow footway leading up to her home. He could but guess from the heaving of her breast that the moisture he kissed from her face was not all rain.

"Not sorry? promise me you are not that!" he said.

She did so faithfully, though her tones belied her words.

"It's like a woman," said Raymond to himself as he went his own way alone. "Give her one thing and she always wants another." He spoke as though a whole world of experience had brought him to the knowledge; the pretence of such cold philosophy eased his heart of a small ache he already had over her. "I love her!" he protested to himself if ever a doubt recurred, and battered his pillow with that when divided thought threatened his slumber. Tristram's mad shouting at the weather was the sedative his brain finally held fast by. Conscience forbade sound slumber while his thoughts were fixed on the woman who had so utterly committed her future to his hands.

As for Tristram, though his suspicions went wide of the mark, he had reason to guess that he had not been the sole visitor that night to the Hill Alwyn woods. Coming up out of the water, he noticed how the boat-house door lay wide, that he had passed closed; and as he trod within came on a little scarf, evidently of woman's wear. The faint play of now distancing lightning was not enough to show him either the colour or the pattern. It was no business of his; thinking it might be, likely enough, of MacAllister's, he threw it upon a pile of boat cushions, where, as chance would have it, that worthy

found it a day or two after. He recognised it at once; and putting that by other things, kept it to strengthen him in an opinion already formed on grounds which he thought adequate.

The next day the Tramp had left the neighbourhood, to follow as Lady Petwyn's guest a fresh freak on his path to perdition or salvation. Not till the late autumn did he return again. Raymond had by then gone off for his final year at Oxford. Old Haycraft was indefinitely away: where, Lizzie herself did not know. He got restless, she told Tristram, and finally went off, bidding her expect him when she saw him: he might be back again by Christmas; if not she would look for him in the spring. Something of the sort she had long reckoned might happen. He had always told her of the wish he had to be once more amongst those he had long lived with, before going underground for good. "And since his illness," said she, "he thinks he ain't got so many years to live as he used to reckon for."

She spoke indifferently; from her manner it would have been difficult to guess that there was, between father and daughter, a strong bond of affection; it lay deeper than words. Tristram learned that money came from him at regular intervals, bearing various post marks but no address. Lizzie welcomed the remittances when they came merely as evidence of her father's wellbeing. She had known early how to work for her own living, and was free, as she told Tristram, to leave the cottage shut up and go out into service if she choose: the old man made no claim for her to stay and keep watch for his return.

A strange pair their neighbours thought them, and for their strangeness left them very much alone. Tristram wished he himself could be as detached from the fixed and hampering circumstances of life. For him it seemed

that was never to be: business again made its clutch at him.

Brother and sister exchanged looks of friendly intelligence on their first meeting. She admired the ruddy glare of his skin, called it clay-colour, and wishing to know what condition of body went with it, found muscles like door-knobs to her fingers. For a drawback the creature was slightly rheumatic. She knew enough of his ways to guess how he had come by that; he was one who to warm his two hands would have preferred a prairie fire to a hot potato, and, put to the test of open-air bathing all the winter, would claim to have it with the ice on. So when his aim was to be like Nebuchadnezzar, the more did he require the dews of heaven to descend on him. The variations of the autumn season made him happy; he paid his penalty cheerfully through the winter following.

He brought but little social news to his elders concerning his visit, beyond quoting the names of those who had been of Lady Petwyn's house-party. Some of these appeared again that same winter at Hill Alwyn, coming for a sort of hunt ball into which at about Christmas the dame chose suddenly to throw all her energies. Tristram went to it growling, submitting to its polish and flummery for the sake of Marcia, who declared herself now a victim to pins and needles in her feet whenever her ear caught music. Certain it was that the spring and whirl of the dance brought out her beauty and charm; she missed nothing over a stretch of four hours, yet emerged from the carriage on their return the freshest of the party. Raymond also was there, another of active ones, finding in her a partner who also danced "for exercise," and to get rid of super-abundant energy.

Mr. Beresford Gavney went less for exercise than for the atmospheric influences of a function that had about

it the mystic flavour of "county." Lady Petwyn was handsome in her introductions, and was herself gracious to him in her own off-hand fashion. He also talked to a Lady Tetheridge, who remembered acquaintance with his wife in their maiden days. He presumed to remember that she had met him also at the time when he had been fluttering into the gentle passion that brought him his mate; and she let him see that it was with no displeasure that she met him again. She confessed to a frank interest in his son. With hesitation he said: "I am relieved to hear it. I thought you must disapprove of him when I heard you calling him 'the ploughboy.'"

"Ah," she said, "that is a pet name for him, meaning exactly the opposite, as is the way with pet names. He is eccentric. I admire your courage in letting him have his run. As a result he is adorable."

Mr. Gayney doubted whether "adorable" were a morally right word for a lady to apply to a young man; but coming from Lady Tetheridge, the wife of a county magnate, the adoration and the pet name were acceptable testimonials to his son's progress.

The merchant had grounds for thinking that the three months' leisure granted to his son had not been thrown away, if it led to amenities such as these. He left the ball highly pleased; and instructed: "Ploughboy," he was glad to understand, used as a pet name, meant "exactly the opposite." For a week afterwards Tristram felt the weight of a benevolent eye. He feared lest in some way his business capacity had earned it. "London" came to be the dreaded word; there hung, like the sword of Damocles, over all their conversations, a date waiting to be named.

Tender thoughts of his mother for ever hampered him; his father's wish he knew would be hers, and might be wrought on to become passionate. "You will not dis-

appoint us all," he foresaw already would be the darling, helpless, powerful woman's argument, the inferred reproach she would bring against him. But for her how much more possible would it be to possess himself, and say no to things for which life least fitted him.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CHAPTER OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

RAYMOND returned to Lizzie with his pride set on convincing her that absence had not made him cease to be the devout lover. In the process of battering his heart back to the early stage of its passion he took vehemence for his guarantee; and with that salved his conscience.

He swore to himself still, without conscious dishonesty, that the girl was all to him; the thought of her kept him from many plans for his future; could there be a better proof? The only plan that had existed for him in any one's mind was now at an end, thanks to her. He told his father bluntly at last that the Church was no place for him; and only from a hard sense of duty consented to go on and try for his degree. Such plans as were in his head, then, when he went Lizzie's way the day after his return, did but concern the months immediately to follow.

He broached them to the girl of his heart; her present loneliness, and the uncertainty of her father's return all fitted in with the fine scheme he propounded. Put shortly it ran thus: here was Lizzie, there was he; and why? when in all parts of England, and not least in Oxfordshire, small cottages were to be had. If she were free to go into service, let her come to him — somewhere, as he phrased it, where he could look after her.

He pressed his scheme with the more ardour when he found that Lizzie was utterly set against it; inarticulately hostile, she could give no reason. "No, no, Ray, be content to let me stay where I am!" she answered to all his tender entreaties, and at last fell back upon silence which he took for mule obstinacy. He, the headier animal, the grosser, missed altogether the subtle distinction made by the girl's sensitive mind between the freedom of her surrender among home surroundings, and the conditions to which her transplanting would bring her down.

She gave herself to him with the more passionate submission now, because her very love forced her to hold out on a matter which she could not argue. Yet whenever he renewed the proposal she seemed to shrink from his tenderness. So, throughout that month of passion, Raymond perceived in her shades of variableness; and seeing how she denied to herself and to him a logical fulfilment of their relation, began in dudgeon to question the constancy of her love rather than his own.

Charged to look him in the face and say at their last meeting why she was determined that it should be so, she showed an unaccountable depth of distress, and at last told him haltingly that it was because she loved him better here than she could there. It was the nearest she could get to the truth he was too slow to feel.

"I've my own way of life here," she murmured, "and you love me now just for what I am. It wouldn't be so if we was away together in a strange place. Let it be as it is. I'll be proud, Ray, to think you miss me sometimes; not more, it won't be, than I miss you every time I lose sight of 'e, when maybe it's on'y for a few hours."

When he said good-bye she kept mute hold of him, sensible of a disapproval she could not avert.

"What may I take, then?" he asked reproachfully at being robbed of his way, and as though he had found her to be a grudging giver.

"Oh, my dear, take me life with 'e!" she cried. "I'd lie down at your feet and die now, if that could give 'e any happiness! There: take that, if it can be any pleasure to 'e!" She let down her dark hair into his hands, and bade him have what he liked of it. Then seeing how little he was about to take, denied him that, and herself cut off a great strand close up to the temple, causing disfigurement by the prodigality of the gift.

Raymond, from that last sight resolved a belief that only a little waiting and the right word were needed to give him the mastery his pride required.

So on his return to College he sent an ardent order to her to come, kind, firm, vehement, considerate, peremptory; and was astonished to receive an unyielding negative. The poor girl, too sure of her own honesty of intent, injured herself in his eyes now, by softening the word with excuses which touched little on her true feeling in the matter. Her master, discerning subterfuge, began to steel himself against her; so far at least as letter-writing went he kept to the note of his decree; if for a few months they were to be separated, against his will and to suit hers, it did his pride some good to make sure that she suffered for it. How much she suffered he was not to learn till he had greatly changed his opinion of her.

During the lonely discomfort of the next few months Lizzie had to bear the renewal of a certain persecution she had before suffered from. She had too high a spirit to let herself be harassed by the mere folly of an unwelcome admirer; but when patience was passed, gipsy blood came uppermost, and she was keen to try a fall with her persecutor.

Her shortest road to and from the Vicarage, whither

she went twice each week to fetch and bring again the household laundry, lay along the right-of-way over the Hill Alwyn estate. There MacAllister, aware of her regular transits, was accustomed to waylay her. That she had been forced at last to choose daylight for her goings was the circumstance that did most wounding to her pride, seeming to accord to a foot-pad the compliment of a fear she did not feel. It was merely her strong distaste for his persistent company that made her select the hours when he was most likely to be employed, or when danger of interruption would drive him from the game.

In addition to her basket, she took to carrying a small bag slung from her waist. The suspicious bailiff noting the fact, and having plenty of will to be unpleasant, chose to assume that she was a pilferer, hiding ill-gotten hoards picked off the estate. One day he demanded to know what she had there, under the dry leaves covering the sack's mouth.

"Ferrets," she told him with a high-headed directness that convinced him she lied. She carried her basket piled with white linen, and being so hampered, it was easy for him to make a dart on the thing she concealed. A single deep thrust of his hand convinced him only too painfully that she had spoken truth; her laugh, mischievous and triumphant, told him another thing, that the trap had been planned. The big man stood up before her at white heat. For a moment she believed he was about to strike her, and stood braced. He chose a shrewder way. Beside himself with rage, he did not stint suddenly to tell her what he knew, or supposed he knew, about her character. "In a few months' time you won't be holding yourself so high, my beauty!"

Outwardly calm, her soul took in panic at the words. She feared that his malice drew its inspiration from

actual observation, and that she could no longer front the world with confidence of her secret remaining unperceived.

With quick decision on arriving at the Vicarage she gave notice that in another week she was going away out of the neighbourhood to seek service. Bearing home with her for the last time the soiled linen that awaited her handling, she was struck with a strange sense of desolation at the thought that in quitting her home she was not going to seek her lover.

The temptation to do so was strong; she fought with it, and, twice worsted, sat down to write to him. But however she set herself to words, the old meaning of the thing stared her in the face; to go to him there would be, she was sure, to go down in his estimation; in her own, too, though of that she thought less. The sense of how she would stand in his eyes made her hold herself sacred.

An event that happened during what she intended to be her last week at home, put into her hands a means of conveying to her uncommunicating lover information that she felt was owing him. However much his silence meant offence at her separation from him, he had the right to know what her circumstances had become.

She stood one brisk February morning hanging linen out in a brief glint of sunshine that fell over Randogger Edge upon the wood-bounded space before the cottage, having already filled the hearth-line indoors with as many things as it would hold, when she became aware of a stranger, who had halted by the gate, contemplating her at her work. Under one arm he carried a square black box, with a round snout or eye projecting from its surface: and, under the other, a sheathed trestle or tripod.

The amateur of the picturesque called out to know if

she would stand and be taken. Smiling her consent, she arranged herself as he directed her.

"Hands up!" he told her. No, she must show her face! He set up his camera, so that her figure, tip-toeing to reach the lines, came clear against the dark of the open doorway. Presently she heard screws and clicks, and the thing was done.

"There, I have you!" exclaimed the photographer, regarding his subject with evident admiration. "If it comes out well, I'll bring you a copy, when I pass again in a day or two."

She thanked him for the offer; she had never yet been photographed, and to possess a counterfeit presentment of herself appealed to her woman's curiosity: she would be able to see herself then with new eyes. But having watched the stranger pack up and depart, she went on with her drying, and thought little more of the matter.

A little after dusk that same evening, her father strolled into the house and sat down in his accustomed chair.

"Well, Liz, how be you goin' on?" was the single remark with which he announced his return. The girl's face flushed for a moment with pleasure at seeing him; but in her answer she showed no more emotion than he; each settled back at a word into the groove of habit which the old man's six months' absence had not disturbed. He had already been up in the coppice, he told her; coming in by way of Randogger. When he had asked after the ferrets, and seen that his guns were in proper order, nothing was said or done to show that he had been away longer than from the day before. He seemed hale enough to his daughter's eye, stronger and better set up than the year before; now and then some trick in his speech showed he had been hearing other talk from that about Randogger side; there were certain changes also in his attire from what he customarily

wore, though with him winter and summer made but little difference.

When they had finished their evening meal together, Lizzie, to make him a special welcome, went out to the wood-shed, and brought in some large faggots; with these she roused a smart blaze, that threw its cheer over the low, barely-furnished room.

After laying aside the supper things she came across and sat down on the opposite side of the hearth facing her father. She pulled out some mendings and had well settled herself before she was aware that the old man's eyes were fixed on her.

"Get me that pipe from over there, my wench," said he, after a while, speaking slow.

It was unlike his silent ways to ask for anything. With a little wonder, but supposing he must be tired, she got up and fetched what he wanted.

No sooner had she put it into his hand, than he cast it away from him.

"Woman, what 'a yer done to yerself?" he cried at her in hoarse speech.

She started, and reddened deeply under his gaze, but did not flinch from the ordeal while it endured.

"Will y' answer me?" he insisted.

She looked back at him, saying no word; their eyes fought in silence for a while.

"Are ye not ashamed to go on looking so?" cried the old man at last.

"No, father," she answered, "that I be not! I'll not lie to please 'e. What I've done, it's there, and has got to be. Don't think but I'm sorry enough for myself now; aye and for you, too, that's got to put up wi' me. But you've on'y got to call me a name an' I'll go!"

"Ay, ye've got your mother's tongue!" growled the old fellow. It was the first time that Lizzie had ever

heard mention of that other parent; it struck a strange thrill in her now.

"I've more of my mother in me than that, and of my father too, I reckon," said the girl proudly.

"An' had better have less of both, mebbe," returned he.

"I wouldn't be any different to what I am!" she replied; and with that, turned and sat down again to her mendings. For a time neither of them spoke.

Haycraft stooped his head down to the fire, and bent questing. Presently he broke silence again. "Is there any party ye've to complain against?" he asked deliberately.

The girl shook her head. "No, it's not him. Don't you be troubling yourself, father; you'd best leave it alone."

"Then be danged, I know 'm!" cried the old man, stamping down firm conviction with his foot. "There 'tis; say no more!"

"Father," entreated Lizzie, "let it be. You can't do no good."

"Ay, wench, I'll not say a word." A moment later he added heavily, "I'd 'a given more nor I can say, I'd 'a given more nor I know, that this shouldn't 'a come about."

On that he smoked through a pipe of tobacco, and without another word mounted to his bed.

Within the week Lizzie's photographer kept his word. "There, Missis! That ought to please your man," he said, smiling as he handed over the print.

She murmured her thanks with burning cheeks; and as soon as she could be rid of him, retired hastily into the house. There, with the photograph before her eyes she wondered how she could have been so blind to her state, and wondered more that no whisper of it should have got

abroad, albeit her recent visit to the Vicarage assured her she was still safe. MacAllister's spiteful shot, her father's sharp scrutiny, and her own fears, all conspired to give her an exaggerated idea of the fact she wished to conceal. Increased pity for herself, and a depression from which she could not escape, made her more than ever long for the comfort her lover only could give her.

She had put the picture out of sight into a drawer and for a week or two could not bring herself to repeat the shock of looking at it again. At last, after deep musing, she drew it out one day, and endeavoured to study it with another's eyes. From that point of view it found favour; there was no doubt it made her look fair, made her look altogether as she wished now to appear in Raymond's regard. Sanguine in the thought and the wish, she slipped it into an envelope, and addressed it to the absent one, hoping that it would carry word to him of all she wished to convey.

For weeks afterwards she stayed on at home, her father relieving her of all errands; stayed, hoping with a hope that slowly chilled for the answer that never came.

More and more she shut herself off from the world, even to the point of remaining unresponsive when Tristram came knocking at the cottage door. She let him depart supposing the place to be shut up and empty.

Going away after his second or third attempt to find her at home, the Tramp met Haycraft, and greeted him with surprise; it amazed him to hear that he had been back over three weeks. "Why didn't you come round and tell me, you old prodigal?" cried the boy, wringing him warmly by the hand.

The old fellow met his advances with a hard front. "You'd 'a found me," said he, "any night if yer'd chosen,

Muster Gavney. Your visits have stopped like, since I come back."

"Stopped?" cried the Tramp in a perplexity over the old man's stern demeanour. "Why, I've been coming for the last fortnight, and never finding any one at home! Where's Lizzie?"

"She be in," said Haycraft, "she be never out now, so to speak."

"Is she ill, then?" enquired Tristram, alarmed.

"She's as she's likely to be; you ought to know."

"But I know nothing!" he cried, bewildered.

"And she 'aven't told 'e to keep away?" asked the old man incredulously.

"Lord! Ben, I haven't even seen her!" exclaimed Tristram, exasperated at not knowing what his companion was driving at.

Haycraft grew grim on hearing that. "Will ye be so good as to step wi' me?" he demanded, and, on Tristram's assent, led the way to a small paddock behind the cottage where he kept his ferrets and the implements and tackle of his various trades. It was a secluded and battered piece of ground, fenced in with high wire netting; occasionally a few fowls had their run there; it was empty now.

Haycraft clicked-to the gate with a decisive snap, and stood fronting Tristram.

"Muster Gavney," he asked, "are you goin' to tell me truth or lies?"

"Help us!" exclaimed the injured youth. "What on earth is the man after? Out with it! What is *your* truth first!"

"Last time you saw Liz was — when?"

Tristram reflected: a month ago he thought was the likely date.

"And didn't she tell 'e anything, either then or before?"

"Anything? Nothing that I remember."

"That's truth?" the old man demanded, looking at him hard.

"Truth, Ben," he affirmed. A horror began to creep over him; the shadow of what was to come.

"Muster Gavney," pursued the old man, "you've seemed a good friend to me, when I've needed it; but you've took a higher price for it than 'twas worth. My girl's got in trouble. Did 'e not know that much?"

Tristram stared aghast. Lizzie in trouble of that sort? he asked himself. "I swear it's not true!" he cried, rallying to a belief in her which he had good cause to hold.

"You swear!" replied the other. "Maybe you didn't know; maybe she kep' it from you; but there 'tis."

Tristram could only shake his head at a thing he would not credit; it seemed monstrous. All at once the shadow of a suspicion crossed his mind: he fought it, forced it away. It was not true; of Liz — he would not believe it.

"Now, sir," continued Haycraft, "there be this question left: what'll you do; and what'll *I* do?"

Tristram wrested his suspicion about: — the fact was there; he had Haycraft's word. How was he to think it possible? In one way only: he recalled a scene he had witnessed, and in a direct flash of thought had singled his man. Let the case be so horrible, he could believe it then!

"Do!" he cried. "Smash him to pieces; break every bone of him! Oh, if she would but have told me of this! You were away?"

"Yes, I were away," answered Haycraft, "but I'm here now. Don't 'e think, Muster Gavney, that we part till this thing's bin settled up. Man to man; that's what I say. Ah! I know, I'm a poor man, and you are a gentleman; and it's no good our likes asking your likes to make

honest women of our girls. But, by God, here where we now stand we'll find which is the better man, the young 'un or the old."

Tristram stared mute to see the great fellow stripping himself for action. A fine figure of a man he became: the stoop went out of his shoulders, he braced himself up to his height, a rugged beauty showed out of the hard, weather-beaten visage. The formidable old limbs responding to great memories of a pugilist's day, promised that they carried behind them a tough customer, one whose movements might be slow but whose stroke could still fell a man.

The lad's first motion towards rage and disgust was swept clean away by a generous impulse of affection and pity. The sight gave him too absolute proof of the poor fellow's honesty for him to stand rigorously to his dues.

"Ben, dear old Ben!" he cried, and had the old man fairly in his arms before he knew. "Listen to me, it's no lie I'm telling you! Oh, I'm not afraid of you; if I had done what you think, you might knock me dead and welcome. But I've done nothing: I knew nothing of this: I'm clear of the whole thing. That I swear!" He saw staggered belief come into his accuser's face.

"No, but," he went on, "I'll not be clear of it in one way; no, Ben! you and I'll stick true! I tell you this: only let me be certain of the man, once certain, and while I have a leg to stand on he shall know if I'm not Lizzie's friend!"

Ending, "Give us your fist!" he had the old fellow hard by the hand; they held each other like steel. Honest hearts reach each other by short cuts when subtlety of intellect would be caught tripping. Haycraft had no doubts left in him; the truth shone too evidently through the lad's vehemence of speech.

The old man's tongue stumbled to make amends.

"Muster Tristram, I ask your pardon," he said, and could not get further; there was no need that he should. The Tramp, half unconscious of him, had his mind fixed on the central tragedy. "Dear Liz! dear, brave Liz!" he murmured. "Oh, she's too brave to be pitied. What can one do for her?"

"Aye, aye," answered Haycraft, "she mun put up wi' the weight on it. 'Tis a hard load; never fear, she'll bear it. But, you'll understand me, Muster Tristram," he rested his eyes with friendly meaning on the youth's face, "so far as I be concerned, half the load of it be off now. Things beant so double black as I thought 'em when I met 'e alone just now. Aye," he added, "Liz may haud her tongue, she's a right to; I won't never force her to speak; but I ain't got me eyes shut for a' that; an' if I had I be a light sleeper, so to speak."

The old man offered Tristram entry to the house on their return, but he, mindful of Lizzie's signal of the shut door, declined the proposal, feeling that without her expressed wish he should not intrude. The very thought of having to see her in her trouble shot confusion to his brain. Yet he told himself that she had but to signal for his help, and from the ends of earth he would come to her.

Now when Lizzie went out, she chose only solitary places, and hours when few folk were likely to be abroad. One morning in early May she rose before dawn, and making her way through pathless fields, came to the brook over which she had once carried the boy Tristram on her back, and given him his first lesson in morals. Coming on the place she sought, she left her basket on the bank, and began gathering watercress, stepping to and fro ankle-deep in the ooze over which it grew. She had not half-filled her basket when the strain of stooping told on her; she mounted the bank to a dry place, and sat

down to rest. Presently her lassitude became so great that she had to lie back, and adjusting her head to the slope, she let her cheek rest against the cool, close growth there that was pushing into leaf.

Under her eyes, through every fissure of the soil, small life was beginning to show: things that sprouted, others that ran. Nature was in her most excrescent mood; the sun fingered the uncurling herbs with skilful midwifery; the brook that purled softly at her feet threw out bubbles to air that broke to let out wings; and from below and above came hungry mouths and beaks eager to be fed, birth-rate and death-rate carrying on a breathless rivalry side by side.

Watching all this, Lizzie's eyes gradually grew closed. The rosy curtains so delicately adapted to a state half-way between waking and sleeping, prompting the mind to the beauty without and to the contentment within, gave the right invitation to rest. Simply the sun's palm, warm, over tired eyelids — if life could only be that, just that and no more, how easy it would be to live! To rest, and to know that, outside rest, bright things lay if one chose to look for them, — that surely would be the perfect state, if ease were the true goal.

She was so close on sleep, that quiet footfalls on the grass approached and stopped, before she could gather sense enough to force open her eyes. Even then they were slow to know the figure that stood, backed by the morning's broadening beams.

It was only when he turned to go that she recognised Tristram. And, alas! of all men that it should be he whom the sight of her had driven away.

What kindness and pity his going indicated she could not tell. Impulsively her hands went out, seized and tore up by the roots the young herbage beside her; went on tearing, till a bare patch from her handling showed

in the green. "Oh, Ray, Ray," she cried, "and I bear all this for you!" She threw herself over on her face, weeping bitterly.

The next day she had left the neighbourhood. Not even her father knew where she had gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

PLANS AND SECTIONS

RAYMOND, nursing his resentment against one to whom his memory still leaned in fondness, was flattered and a little touched at receiving her token. It rekindled so much of the lover in him, brought back to him so vividly the spell of her presence, that, while lavishing tenderness on the small space which gave him her features, he regretted that in the place of a whole-length he had not a fuller rendering of dear mouth and eyes.

Yet, even as it was, the sweet memories it brought almost moved him into relenting the hard silence he had practised. Had one word of her love for him come with it, his resolution had not been proof against sending her some small token in reply.

But the very muteness of the missive made him regard it suspiciously as a riddle; and seeking the solution, he restrained his desire to find in it more than was there. Should it mean that Lizzie was willing now to yield the point that separated them, then a little more silence on his part would help her to know who henceforth was to be master. If, on the other hand, it was but a lure inviting him to accept things as she had ordered them, and to grant her an indulgence in writing, then delay would serve still better to instruct her. So, for the settling of the question he, too, waited, thinking that a week or two at the most would bring the fond girl to her knees; and, as he cherished the fair profile which gave but half the

mouth's sweetness, and one cheek only under a dark-set eye, missed altogether the real meaning with which it came laden, and, with a little intentional cruelty, was cruel in a far larger degree than he dreamed.

While he still held off, a letter reached him from Tristram making mention of Haycraft's return. With much to say of the father, of the daughter it told nothing. Chafing to have news of her, Raymond was vexed by the omission, and chose to imagine it strange. He was provoked also at having to admit that Lizzie now stood justified in her refusal to quit home. So Raymond let the estrangement keep its force, planning for their meeting in the ensuing summer a scene of fond wrath and reproach which should win her to a more meek allegiance in the future than she had rendered him in the past. Let her but confide absolutely in him, and the world, he told himself, should not contain a lover more tender in fulfilling the obligations of his trust.

So he planned.

Midway through June, having failed to gain his degree, Raymond quitted the University for good. Arriving to play the wounded lover he found that his heroine had quitted the stage.

Meeting the Tramp he questioned him obliquely, and got oblique answers in return. He heard from him no more than was known at the Vicarage as to Lizzie's whereabouts. As she had spoken of going out to service, it was supposed now she had gone. To his further probings the Tramp bade him ask Haycraft, and at that, Raymond was forced to let the matter rest. With Haycraft he could not well push enquiry beyond a casual remark. Yet all day the thought of her engaged his mind.

Was he not a lover faithful and constant? His feet sought the lonely wood-tracts where they had been used to meet; he chose her hours, and stood continually on the

spot whence could be seen her window looking out on the high wood-bank surrounding her home. Even when he ceased to persuade himself that her return was merely delayed by accident, or through a mistake as to the date of his own, he came back again and again to the quest, though it was with embittered feelings that he now longed for her to appear. Before showing mercy, he needed to be unmerciful first, — must strike before he could forgive. She, not he, he told himself, had started division between them; for, at the very best interpretation, her removal meant distrust of him.

Thus lonely in the places of their past meetings, the lover came to regard Lizzie's absence as a definite affront, a breach that was intended to be final. With her father back, she must have gone for the sole purpose of avoiding him; that she should have done so, leaving no clue as to her whereabouts, was a further proof that she meant to be quit of him.

Utterly bewildered when first called on to believe it, he found in conviction a quick hardening process for his heart. His mind recalled the sweetness of Lizzie's looks and words, only to sum up a whole that he must reject as false. Whatever had seemed truest in her ways towards him, came to be the measure of her pretence; her passionate abandonment of herself to his hands, her humble forebodings concerning a future wherein he was to stand blameless, all that had then seemed to place him high, served now only to inflame the wound his pride had sustained. He had not ceased loving her; she, incredible, had ceased to love him; believing himself worshipped, he had come to find himself deserted.

Here, then, was woman, cried self-love, treating him as man, if he stooped and let himself be conquered, must expect to be treated. He was not the man to take reverse of this sort in meek submission; rather must he smite, and

smite till the fair image that unworthy had won place in his heart, should seem no longer fair to him. Still to love her, was to stand small in his own esteem, the cheat of his senses; all the tenderness for her that his heart retained was but convicted folly that whined not to be cast out. He had to admit, in the astonishing pang of the process, that he had loved the woman, whom he now put to inner torment and death. Once he had almost thought of her as mate-worthy, his right complement and pair; now he forced himself so deeply to doubt all he knew of her, as to make her a different creature, scarce recognisable even as a debased version of his dream. He was implacable till he had turned her into an unimportant item of the past; the struggle was, he found, to do it.

Lookers-on who know more of Lizzie's case than Raymond had wit to guess, may think badly of a love that could turn to such rancour and pride; but human nature is peculiarly at its worst when, wrong, it assumes itself to be right. If you would measure a man finally, wait till he convicts himself of sin, then judge him. That surely is Heaven's own test, and the meaning of the hour when neither the earth nor the rocks shall be able to give cover to man's conscience.

Tristram discovered soon enough the change that had come over his friend, for the happy relations between them fell into some disorder. Raymond's reckless air showing the man out of sorts was forgivable enough; not so the new tone of cynical disdain he affected: it sat ill on one who, truth to say, had no intellectual ability to carry it off. More than once the two came to words over differences which would before have but set them chaffing. Quick after the clash of tongues broke out the old Raymond, straightforward, dictatorial, but honest.

"Don't mind me, Tramp!" he cried. "I tell you I've been hard hit, devilish hard. You remember what that

old gipsy woman told me last year; a long journey to go, and a far-off country to live in, was her word for it. Well, it saves me the trouble of thinking; I'm for the Colonies: — to live in England one needs a head-piece. I've been taking three years to find out that I've none. I've made a mess of it here; best thing I can do is to go and be a new broom in a new country. I've a few things to settle and a few more to learn; then it'll be good-bye everybody! In a year not one of you will miss me."

Tristram imagined that his friend's pride had been deeply hurt by failure for his degree, and was puzzled to find him so put out over a thing toward which he had previously had so little ambition. How would he have stood better in prospects, the Tramp asked him, had he succeeded? He thought very little of Raymond's grumble at himself, crying, "To be as free as you are now, I'd exchange skins with you to-morrow!"

Raymond hunched and spoke of debts. He had still to break them to his father. Tristram said, "In another year I believe I could lend you something," adding, "You wait, and you'll see me dancing to a tune of my own, then! I'm going to chuck this precious business head of mine; but it's no use crying off till I can start the other thing, and I don't know what the other thing will be yet. Oh, fresh air's the first item! I've given my father hints. He won't seem to see it; thinks that to sit on a wool-sack all one's life is as good as becoming Lord Chancellor."

He summed up his grievance by protesting that to go into Sawditch every day was to put his head into a sack and feel suffocated. His morning rides were the only present comfort and stretch that his energies could secure; for those he was as regular as the clock, up punctually two full hours before breakfast.

Another member of the household was also an early riser. In the open air Marcia and the Tramp generally

exchanged morning greetings; and the footway between Hill Alwyn and the Valley House became their usual place of encounter.

Thus, a week after his home-coming Raymond fell in with her. With the woods behind him, he fronted a pitch of bare meadow tingling with red field sorrel, along whose edge the run of wind made a hurrying pulse of lights and darks. Over earth's shoulder Phœbus still leaned low, lifting his bonnet of cloud to the morning; from the air overhead jetted invisible sparkles of song. It was the dew-lit hour, before heat had drawn off the cool bloom of dawn. No other country can give to an Englishman the full incense-breath of early day which comes to him through the laden airs and fields of his native land. Raymond had never travelled, but turning his thoughts now to places far over-sea he felt in his blood a prediction of the loss he would have to know; and a sentiment for his own country, almost a stay-at-home wish, took hold of him consciously for the first time.

Towards him came a fresh vision of English girlhood, stepping at a great pace, making a bright business of her morning's walk. Her warm colour over the fluttering coolness of a light summer gown gave to her face the posy-beauty of flowers close-massed without leaves to single them into form. In the even glow of its rich tints, face before features was what one saw. For face alone posy was the word; for form and bearing, a rod in blossom, a high, straight spray swinging free, was the thought that came nearer. Warmed breezes off a high hill, bracing vision of cool sunlight, to a lover with a taste of comparisons, Marcia's beauty had stood sisterly to these.

The fair girl had no lover; to be heart-whole was still part of her charm; the rose-window of her face lay cool in its morning shadows, unswept dews still guarded her earth from the piercing of Love's beams.

"Ah, Raymond, is it you?" she cried, with a look of welcome on seeing him. "Up so early?" sang her own praises as well as his. "I'm meeting Tristram," was the explanation she gave of herself.

Raymond was willing enough to turn and go back with her. They walked together, she doing the talking, for the full breadth of a field. Her tongue was in its most up-with-the-lark mood; the mere pleasure of seeing things awake put her into livelier speech than was her custom.

"What, you are moody still?" she turned to say presently. "Even now; and look what a morning!"

"Ought one to change one's moods with the weather?" enquired he.

"To be sure! What's the weather for, otherwise? Give me grey all the year round and I'll be consistent!"

"Whatever would you be like then?"

"Crabby, unbearable; you would get to the bed-rock of all my bad qualities at once!" She glanced to take in her companion's aspect. "Don't go in grey, dear man, Raymond, not internally, I mean."

"What, you find me unbearable?" he asked, with a hard, short laugh.

"So-so," she answered, giving a friendly tone to her words. "Noises like that you might just as well leave out."

"Why shouldn't I laugh at myself? It helps me to bear being shown I'm a fool."

"Who shows you that?"

"Don't facts?" he asked.

"You mean negatives, disappointments. Why, a man should bear those and be the better for them. Who ever thinks the worse of you for not being a B.A.?"

"Oh, I can bear that," growled Raymond. "It's other things I mind about."

"Every one has to bear something," said Marcia. "I've a woe, though I don't show it; or do I?"

He looked into the quiet laughter of her dark eyes. "Indeed, and you don't!" he assured her; "I'll believe it when I hear it."

"I'm too strong for my sex," she told him. "There are so many things I *can* do, and mayn't. It never strikes a man, I suppose, what a prison that is? You don't want to thread needles and darn stockings, or wear your hair long; all things you could do if you wished. If you want to break out, you break out, and that's the difference. But look at me!"

"That's what I'm doing," said Raymond. They were at a stile; vaulting it he stood on the other side ready to hand her over.

"There, I could do that!" she said to him.

"Then do it!"

"No," she said, and set herself demurely to climb. "Now you see how I have to waste time. To see any one jump gives me a pang. And think with those feelings, what it must be to have Tramp as one's brother? Sometimes it's no use; I have to let myself go."

"What do you do then?"

"Pick up the first thing that comes handy, and carry it till I drop, or till it drops. Generally it kicks and cries, 'Oh, Miss Marcia!' or, 'Really, Marcia, my dear, you mustn't!' in quite a dignified, shocked fashion. But I must! A man really doesn't know the trial it is to be well-behaved, because he hasn't to be."

She chattered on, with quick turns of the head, while keeping to his pace. Her eyes threw laughter at him over a mouth controlled gravely to the burden of its complaint.

"Yet, behold me, happy enough!" she declared finally. "And have you any grievances so great, that you should

not be? Do, please, be holiday-like, and come walks with me!"

Raymond glanced at the high colour and lit eye; she seemed glad merely to be feeling her feet under her. The romance of another face drifted across his senses. Fairer? no. Yes, for him. Ah, no! not now. He banished it to ask whether walking were a hobby of hers.

"My hobby-horse," she answered; "the Tramp taught me to ride it."

"His own pace too." Raymond, stepping beside her, recognised it.

"Oh yes! He has spoiled me for walking with all women-kind; when I can't get him I go alone. Slow-walking is what tires me; it gets hold of different muscles that I haven't got. You remember what a rate we three used to go at? Aunt Julie tells me I look improper when I do that now. D'you think anything improper that one really likes?"

"I don't think you improper," said Raymond, and let his meaning be seen.

She returned the compliment, laughing, "And I'm sure you are not!"

Marking how confidently she stepped, he asked her how much walking she thought she could do.

"I never get a fair test now," she complained; "Trampy's time is too occupied. Once or twice I have been on the beginnings of my last legs; but it was mud not distance that brought me there."

"Do you mind about hills?"

"Up I like them; not down."

"That's because you wear heels. Women are like hares, all up at heel. They think it helps them to get there; and, pushing a toe, they cut off a limb."

Marcia showed him hers, guiltless of the excrescence.

"Ah, so that's how you get your stride," said Raymond.

"See some women walk, and it would never occur to one that they had legs above their ankles. Do you run ever?"

"Alone; or when Tramp makes me."

"How does he make you."

"Brings me through a field where cows are," she returned with perfect gravity. "It's his one cruelty; he says it's to cure me; but I can't be cured. Mice I've no feeling about, cows I have. I feel creepy about them; it's no question of size. I look at them and I run."

"Come," said Raymond; "over there are cows."

"No; there's Trampy!" She waved up her hand and sang out to him for his news, as he came on with a particularly radiant face.

"News? Oh, none!" he answered; but added, "you wait!"

"You look like a spread eagle!"

"I feel it," said the boy.

Truly he felt uplifted, like Ganymedes. He was fresh from colloquy with Lady Petwyn: without warning she had sprung on him a proposal, a buffet from the blue.

"If MacAllister died or departed," she said, "would you care to replace him?"

"Him?" exclaimed Tristram, hanging on the wrong word to express his surprise.

"Oh, of course, you'd want training; but some day you may reckon that the post will be vacant."

Tristram had a scruple. "You don't turn him out?"

"No, I don't turn him out. At present he suits me. The point is, will you go in and study the business under him?"

The Tramp shook his head, with solid certainty that he could not.

"I didn't suppose so!" said the dame. "You are far too stuck up and proud to accept things sensibly. Luckily I've the other place in Wales which you've been to. Will

it suit you to go and make a mess of things on a small scale first; and perhaps come on here afterwards? I've thought of this but said nothing — left your father to give you your first polish. He tells me you've a business-head; now I strike in. What d'you say? Will you come?"

The future opened on him like a landscape.

"To-morrow!" cried the Tramp.

"Well, I give you three months," said she. "I'm mistaken if you'll find it such plain sailing. For all I know, a quarter's the legal notice. If so, I don't imagine I shall get you away for less. Understand, young man, if you do this, there's more work ahead for you than perhaps you think of." She nodded darkly, scrutinising his unsuspicious face.

It was with this brimming in his body that the Tramp went down that day to join his father at Sawditch. Finding him much harassed he postponed word of it; and from day to day, for the same reason allowed the matter to stand undiscussed. At the end of a week, dislocation of interests so wrought on him, that to contain himself became actual pain.

"You are not any help to me, Tristram!" Mr. Gavney cried irritably one day, cast this way and that with worry and the stress of matters requiring immediate settlement. His hand went up to his head as he spoke. "You might as well not be here!"

Tristram, seizing on the verbal opening, braced himself to deliver his mind. Let this be settled, he would put his back into all that had to be done so long as he remained. Without great affection for his father, he felt a tenderness, almost a compunction, at coming to the point. He spoke, and saw before him a petrified face. Having begun, he felt that he owed it to himself and Lady Petwyn to put the matter clearly. He was hot upon the new

project. Meeting amazed protest, he did not scruple to show a settled mind.

That night there was grief and dismay at the Valley House. Mr. Beresford Gavney had been brought home ill; how ill, no doctor could say with certainty. Absolute quiet was enjoined. His faculties hung wavering in a darkened room.

Tristram felt himself a culprit.

CHAPTER XXV

BUSINESS HEADS AND LOGGERHEADS

AT the Valley House, order and the repose wrought by ministering hands succeeded the shock of catastrophe. Tristram's arrival at Sawditch close on noon of the next day showed him a different picture. A pile of correspondence lay unanswered, and unanswerable, the head clerk assured him, needing the attention of a directing head. Other matters pressed shrewdly; certain settlements were impending; and on the credit side the books showed unsatisfactory features, several debts marked as bad, together with others slow to realise. The big firm had been living in hand-to-mouth fashion; and the least check threatened to throw the whole machinery out of order. Tristram found that, while he himself had an inkling on most matters, gathered from consultations in his father's sanctum, at which he had been present, the head clerk had definite knowledge of only a third. He felt the weight of the house pressing on his shoulders, and was without confidence in his coadjutor. Before four o'clock in the afternoon a message went from him to the outer office for despatch, informing Gilpinger that his old berth lay open for his immediate acceptance. The "come" of the offer was urgently emphasised.

A minute later the senior clerk presented himself, form in hand.

"This telegram, sir?"

"I wish it sent," said Tristram.

The man offered a respectful protest. None of the other clerks would work with Mr. Gilpinger, was what he begged leave to state.

"They won't have to. He will work with me; he will occupy my father's chair during his absence."

"That is a large order, sir."

"A necessary one," said young Jack in office, and when the other threatened argument, reminded him that he had not been invited to discuss the matter. The telegram was sent. Tristram could hear mutterings.

He had not counted on his man in vain; before the office closing-hour, Gilpinger presented himself, and touched Tristram by enquiring eagerly and foremost for last news of his old employer. It was not the errand he had come on.

His pupil showed him the machine he had once handled so well, now out of gear, at friction, threatening a standstill. Was he up to the work? the boy asked him.

"Who trained *you?*" was the grim response, showing that the old fellow did not think his day over for the surmounting of great obstacles.

To a further enquiry, "When will you come?" "I'm here," sounded satisfactory.

"Ah! you are all right," cried Tristram, and had him by the shoulders down into the chair he was to occupy.

"Now, John Gilpin, you set the pace!" said he, and turned his back resolutely on broad daylight.

It was a late hour that night when he reached home. His mother was sitting up for him, worn out and anxious. All was still well, he heard, being no worse. "He has spoken," was the best news.

"You mean consciously?"

"He said, 'Where's Tristram?' When I told him, he said, 'That's better.'" Doubtless she knew of differences,

for she said anxiously, though without reproach, "My dear, you love your father?"

"I'd do anything in the world to help him!" cried Tristram, and satisfied her.

She put her thin hands round his face and kissed him. "Go to bed, my dear," she ordered tenderly.

"Dear little mother," murmured the boy, "you must do that; see, I'll carry you! Who sits up?"

"Marcia," said she. "Ah! if I had her strength!"

His sister met him returning from his mother's room; she touched his forehead with her cheek and looked shrewd enquiry at him.

"I've been putting my business-head on to older shoulders," was his account of the day's work.

"What may I tell him?" she asked; "he is sure to question. He wakes up to enquire after you, and won't be satisfied till he has heard."

"Tell him, I'm there, that I'm sticking to it. Oh, yes, give him my love, and say it's all right."

Five minutes later the touch of the sheets won him to dead slumber till the call of the morrow. He woke to a round of similar days.

Work so pressed on him that he had no longer time to run over to Hill Alwyn for his morning rides. Aware of the reason, his kind old dragon sent across to the Valley House a mount for him, punctual to the stroke of eight each day. He took his canter to and from Sawditch, full of gratitude for a service which gave him time for his beloved exercise. Thus did strong and weak, with contrary pullings, strive to divide his heartstrings between them. So hard were the hours he kept, and so keen was his application, that when his father's danger was declared to be over he almost felt that the curing process had come from him; and trusted confidently to receive reward for his stewardship.

Gilpinger had done wonders; with a malicious joy he traced out the mistakes, shortcomings, and laxities of book-keeping which had followed the withdrawal of his iron rule. The Gilpinger code was reinstituted. Tristram stood as buffer between his snarling tempers and the flesh and blood of office-workers who could not have put up with it. Nevertheless, black looks followed the old man as he entered and left the establishment.

A book came up done in the old fashion, a deliberate assertion of the sacredness of custom. Tristram weeded out the recalcitrant with a quick hand. "If you like to come and ask to be taken back again when my father returns, I'll state a case for you," said he as he paid the man his wages. "For the present my authority holds good; you happen not to agree with it."

He stood the test, hard to youth, of being a little unpopular for a time, having before been a favourite. Gilpinger's shot-out lip, which had shown things were serious, relaxed after a while; they ceased to burn oil approaching on midnight. The old clerk said one day: —

"See, we've got the web right again; the centre of it's *here!*" he slapped his desk. "Your father has been sitting too much to one side. Fact is, he never took *my* seat at all after I left; it seems to have been a general play-place for fools. Mind you, if you or he don't sit in it when he comes back and I'm gone, you'll be in the same mess again."

Tristram said, "If my word is good for anything you are to keep it and choose your own time for getting out of it. I shall not be in your way, that I promise you. As soon as I can speak to my father on business matters, your name goes foremost. I've been constitutional princeling to your Prime Ministry is the report I take him. If you want to do me a return service, tell him I've no business-head."

"And any other lie?" asked the old fellow, by way of showing crusty admiration of the lad's abilities.

Riding home every evening Tristram fell into pleasant thoughts of coming freedom. An omen of happiness had reached him at a time when his heart needed cheering, a letter from the dear Sage back from foreign travel and restored to his old health. The boy longed to have speech with him again, and wrote that the pleasure was only briefly postponed. He hoped to carry fine news over with him when he went.

Wishing to thank his old dame for her kindness, he came back betimes one evening and rode on to Hill Alwyn. On the way he passed a cart coming up out of Cob's Hole laden with cottage furniture; beside it walked a labourer with wife and children, a respectable, poor family, not the sort to be victims of an eviction.

"What, are you leaving?" he stopped to exclaim; and when they affirmed the fact, "Where to, then?" he enquired.

From question to question he came on a sad enough story. Their two youngest children had died of diphtheria in the home they were now quitting; and since no remedy to existing conditions was promised them, these poor folk, who actually wished for their children to live, were moving to Bembridge, the nearest place available. Thence to the man's work was three miles, but not a cottage was to be had nearer.

The shame of it flushed the boy's cheek as he entered the rich Hill Alwyn acres. Lady Petwyn's conscience, with MacAllister as its keeper, was no pretty object to him.

His lady welcomed him with open arms and kind scurrilous abuse. "How's your father?" she asked presently, and so came to her main point: "When is he going to let you off? when am I to call you my man?"

Tristram spoke his mind straight on that subject, with conscience fresh from a toasting. "Madam," said he, "if I am ever to follow MacAllister, it must be on conditions: Cob's Hole will have to go."

"I hear you say so," said the dame. "How long has your brain had that bubble in it?" To his hot statement of the circumstances by which he hoped to move her: "Froth it off," said she.

To attempt the cajolery of soft words would, he saw, be ruinous to the cause he advocated. He pointed instead to the plain fact that such hovels drove good labourers off the estate.

"It's pound foolish," said he.

"Well," she retorted, "call it my penalty for being extravagant; I haven't the pennies to be wise with."

"You could start building on a loan to-morrow, if you chose. The cottages themselves would be a sufficient security."

"And three years hence would be pig-sties!"

She relished argument with the Tramp too well to trouble to talk soberly. Her tongue whipped him along a well-beaten track that, as ever, was to lead them nowhere.

"I make you an offer," she said finally, "I'll do the same by you as by the Cooper-Petwyn gang. If you want Cob's Hole you may buy it, and build a new tower of Babel in your own way. There, I mean it; I've listened quite enough to your nonsense and temper!"

"Seriously?" asked Tristram. She nodded.

He jumped up, crying, "Done!"

"Very well," she snapped, with a grim look at him. "Mind you be ready. In a year's time MacAllister goes; I may as well tell you now that he got his notice

from me this midsummer. When the time comes I must replace him. I'll do no dancing attendance on cranks and crazes; I want a business man. I warn you the thing will cost you a cool five thousand."

"MacAllister goes! You promised you wouldn't turn him out!"

"He turns himself out: wouldn't obey my orders: went trespassing in a direction I chose to think inconvenient. There the matter stands; he goes out, somebody has got to come in. The offer rests with you; take it or leave it!"

"Give me just a month over the year, and I'll take it."

"Oh, I'll give you the month, if you think your conscience can bear up under Cob's Hole in the interval."

She felt somehow that she was being conquered; the Tramp was gaining his ridiculous point, notwithstanding her contempt and threats to have done with him. The thought made her put a bark on to her parting speech.

"For once," she said, "you have succeeded."

"In what way?" he asked.

"Been a prig."

"Your nursing has done it," he answered.

At home he found Marcia back from an airing, with Raymond for a companion. She came laden with wild-flowers.

"Talking of small incidents by the way, we met Lizzie Haycraft," she said. "No, we didn't speak to her; I just caught sight of her, and hardly knew her till she had passed; she looks pale and altered. Service has knocked her up, I suppose; so now she's back. Have you seen her?"

The Tramp flushed a little consciously at the news; he was glad to hear it, yet had a wonder. "No," he said,

"I've had no time to see any one; in a day or two I must go over."

"Ray," said Marcia, "tells me he's off."

"Off! When? where to?"

"To-morrow, into Wiltshire. I shall miss him, Trampy; he has helped me to breathe; I don't look broken down, do I? And I've been chief nurse all along; to-day I made papa own it; as if he knew anything at all about it, poor darling! He's most meek when I talk to him; agrees with everything I say, even when I tell him you are a good boy. He'll get up with quite a reformed notion of you."

The shadow of what his father's commendation meant crossed Tristram's mind; but his new scheme had now grown too material and big for him to have fears about its ultimate reality. Thus he built his castle on the edge of a precipice of sand.

Marcia's last walk with Raymond remained imprinted on her mind, by reason of a kindly fear that, by some careless word, she had done him an injury. Starting in gayest spirits they had returned in gloom. What had she done to bring about the change? Somewhere she knew he carried a wound; had she, she asked herself, been heedless in a chance handling of it?

"I go to-morrow," he had said at parting, though when speaking of the project only two hours earlier he had left the date indefinite. "No," he declared, then, in the face of her surprise, "I've not changed my mind at all; I've had it made for me. You told me I ought to be up and doing; there's sheep-farming to be learnt, and away in Wiltshire the opportunity is waiting for me. Oh, you've been a good fellow to me, Marcia; talking to you has shown me what I'm fit for, and something that I'm not. Now, if I don't see you again before Christmas, you needn't think I'm idle. And if I want

advice again before I leave England, I'll come to you for it." They parted firm friends. What, then, had so abruptly decided him? Marcia reviewed the incidents of the road and all their conversation together during that day, but could hit on no solution. To be sure she had on this, as on other occasions, given him motherly advice, for she loved dearly to be wise. When he first spoke of his debts to account for the strain of depression she noticed, her common-sense cut off his right to the luxury altogether.

"You haven't really an anxiety," she then told him.

"But how can I help having?" he urged.

"About them? none. You know your father will pay them. You've only a bad conscience; that's a very different thing. Get rid of it."

To his "How?" she replied, "Make a clean breast of it." And on their next meeting he owned to a conscience so much the lighter.

Afterwards, in his first gay mood, she asked him, "Now haven't I done you good?" and won laughing admission of the fact. Getting him to talk nonsense, she was quick to approve the change of note in him.

"Now you are more sensible," she said.

"Yes? if you call this being sensible."

"I do; to enjoy one's self always is!"

That was her doctrine, and to a point it had acted as a cure for his malady. What then had she done differently on this one occasion to bring about the change?

She retraced their way over meadow and hill, and through deep wooded lanes; and from each reconstructed scene came memories of the subjects they had discussed. Was it there that she hurt him, or there? Their talk

on sheep-farming had suggested Hiddenden for an objective; and she wanted to be introduced to quaint old Daddy Wag-top. Time failing them, their farthest point had been a cottage hidden away in the bend of the Randogger wood. They found themselves then, on enquiring, seven miles from Hill Alwyn, and might have been twenty from anywhere, such a remote strange little corner of the world did it seem.

A small girl standing at the cottage gate directed them to the shortest way, so far as she knew it; but her knowledge of the country ceased at the main road to which she pointed them. A child herself, this slippet of a body sustained the weight of a small babe slung in a shawl over her arm. Marcia stopped to look into a brown face buttoned up with sleep.

"Sister or brother?" she enquired.

"'Tain't ourn, it belongs to lodger; it's a 'e," answered the child.

Marcia laid a finger on the soft poll, touching its down fondly.

"Oh! what a furnace!" she cried, "I can feel his heart beating!" Smiling to Raymond she said, "I suppose babies bore you?"

"I've never found much to see in them yet," he admitted.

"I lose my heart to them," she said, "I should like to buy that little dormouse." On their way home they passed late dog-roses, and Marcia, wilfully gathering more than she could hold, made Raymond share her prickly handfuls. He was gay enough then.

She could not trace to anything said or done the manifest change that had come over him, and showed most of all in his parting words.

It was to be a separation of some months, if his intentions held good. Bidding him good-bye, she said

frankly, "I shall miss you, Ray." Hearing of him actually gone the next day, she found in the thing accomplished something less understandable than the mere threat, which might have sprung from the mood of a moment.

"Is the poor boy in love with somebody?" was the notion that came involuntarily into her head. A moment later she was vexed to have let it come there, and did her best to be rid of it.

Raymond's thoughts of her on parting were not of the lover's kind: yet they were those of a man who was willing to efface a past by whatever he could find of fair in the present. "There's the sort of girl I like!" he told himself. "Who likes me," lay as the unrecognised germ to that statement. Matching him with spirits half blithe, half grave, she did something to restore his self-respect: much to give him a new reverence for womanhood. For through all her frank comradeship he discerned no easy way to the loverly caress. She was a woman who would make no compromise for love; stride by stride she would race and test the man who should wish to secure her heart, inferiority on a single point she prized would lose her to him; like Atalanta she would run; unlike her, no golden apples would ever turn her aside. By a continence of beauty similar to the continence wherewith an athlete endows his body, it was her gift to banish all that body of sentiment which goes to bid flickering sparks ape the pure flame of love. Her manner stood independent of the troublous charm of her sex; there was no lurking in it of the things quick to fascinate and lure; there might some day be revelation for one alone where the secrecies of hearts unfold. This was the woman whose face Raymond kept as a barrier between him and a thing he wished to forget, another face passed without a sign of recognition. Just so much

at the moment had off-hand pride enabled him to accomplish. "Halt! halt!" had cried his heart. "Forward!" came from somewhere the opposing voice.

Obeying it, he yet found that to maintain that resolution he must quit his home. Pride ruled, but had not the entire allegiance of his soul.

CHAPTER XXVI

LIZZIE LOSES HER REPUTATION

LIZZIE had seen once more the man she loved; death of love had looked back at her out of his face. Her feet succeeded in bearing her through the ordeal of his eyes: no more. When he had gone by, she stood still, turned and would have given her world then to see his face, however forbidding, look round on her once more, to show that she still travelled in his thoughts. Instead she saw a head kept resolutely straight, and heard light talk and laughter receding up the lane. Tristram's name reached her. Was his sister, then, the woman whose face she had not seen, whose flowers Raymond bore in his cap? She neither knew nor cared to know: the searing vision of love's recognition denied to her threw so black a night over her brain that there remained hardly any meaning in what she saw.

It was evening light; over her head the wood boughs were hung wonderfully with song; the outcry of torture had been better company to her ears.

Over and above the shrewd anguish of her heart, a terrible perplexity took hold of her reason. In that her mind so stumbled that for a while her limbs remained without the directing impulse necessary to action. As though she thought instruction would come with patient waiting, she stood looking up the road by which Raymond

had gone, never stirring a step. So she remained stunned while many minutes went by.

All at once she drew a hard, dry breath that ended in a sound of shivering. Her hands went up to her forehead and down again; all the thinking in the world was no use. "Oh, my God, but it can't be!" she murmured, and stumbled to the grass-bank under the hedge. "Oh, Ray, oh, my dear love!" came then as the free utterance of her grief. "Oh, Ray!" she rang his name up and down, to exclaim against and to cherish.

"Why have you done this to me?" she was presently enquiring of the absent one, but again could not get quit of the sound that meant more to her than all words. "Ray, Ray," she cried, "what have I done that you should wish to forget me so soon? Were you so afraid that I should speak t'e? Oh, Ray, was it that?" So she cried, and seemed waiting answers that did not come.

It was not pride but humility which forced these piteous interrogatories. The poor girl, questioning her own mind and her absent lover aloud, was ready to discover that the fault had in truth been hers. But in spite of all that she could urge against herself, the stony denial of his look was a cruelty whose meaning she could not solve save by accepting it at its surface-value — seeing in it the death of the love that had once been hers.

At the thought that it might be true the hard tensity of her agitation broke down into a simple abandonment of grief.

Recognising how low she stood in his regard, acquiescing in what she had ever believed must one day be inevitable, she allowed her tears to get the better of her, and seemed in the wild indulgence of her sorrow to

recover touch with the heart she had lost. Raymond's love for her was over and done with; fate had but brought home to her with quick stroke the end she had always feared; and she could receive the dead past, like a mother her babe, to weep over.

Humility gave her courage to accept what it seemed must henceforth be her lot; but it was with pure pride and gladness in the midst of her distress that she remembered the one thing of which she could not be deprived, hers and his. The thought of that which finally drew her onward to her present place of abode. Nature indeed was calling her, plucking her by the breast with familiar thrills, reminding her of the lapse of time. With a face already quiet in its grief, she rose and stepped out.

For a short distance she had to follow the high road before again entering into cover of the quiet Randogger lanes; she found the broader track as solitary, however, as the one she had just quitted, and followed its windings for nearly a mile without meeting or seeing a soul. But, as she drew within sight of her next turning, she saw just before her a couple of tramps, man and woman, plodding slowly along. The man led, the woman followed, bearing a double burden: over one arm hung a bundle tied up in a dirty cloth, on the other a child lay and wailed miserably. The pair seemed utterly dispirited and worn out; the man lame, the woman dragged down and wrenched crooked by the two loads she carried. Coming within earshot, Lizzie could hear the man's voice thrown back in loud grumbling at his wife. Having little wish just then to come into contact with any of her fellow-creatures, the girl hung back, hoping to reach her corner without overtaking them; but insensibly she drew nearer, her feet unused to so slow a pace, until she could overhear the words they exchanged.

Turning aside, she leaned on a gate, and waited for them to go forward.

"Cries? course, 'er cries," answered the woman, to some remark of her companion. "'Er's 'ungry, 'er won't sleep till 'er's fed."

"Who stops yer feedin' it?" enquired the other, and, wanting an excuse for rest, sat down on a heap of turf by the roadside, twenty paces beyond where Lizzie now stood. "There," said he, "don't say I tells yer to starve it." The woman sank down beside him, and began with a dull, listless motion to rock the child to and fro upon her knee, disregarding the plucking of its tiny hands. At length, since its wail increased, she drew open her gown, and allowed the small creature to fasten upon her breast.

For a moment only the monotonous crying lulled; it broke again into louder complaints than before; the babe beat itself about with feeble rage, then choked and fell into a prolonged strain of coughing.

"Call yerself a mother?" said the man; "'ush it, I tell yer!"

The woman took down the child from her breast, and began to fasten her frock. "I ain't got a drop for it," she cried in a leaden voice of indifference or despair; "'ow can I 'ave, walkin' all these miles, an' no proper food to do it on! It's you, Bill, with your drink and gettin' out o' work, starves the two on us. I say it; yer do!"

For evidence against him she strained the little misery up to her breast; — let him see how starved. "It's no use yer cryin'," she said, "Mammy's got nothing. Yer'd be better if yer was dead."

Down wind every word carried to Lizzie; she listened to the voice of a misery deeper than her own; a misery without hope or wish left to it; it gave her a sense of

shame. She stood up from the gate and started on, wanting, she knew not why, to look on the face of this other woman. It was perhaps as much pitying curiosity as charity that drew her on.

Coming nearer her looks fell first on the man. She shifted them quickly to the face of his companion; dumb-dog eyes met hers. With a thrill of sisterliness she discovered in herself a sudden fear, a wish that she had not looked. In spite of herself, it seemed, her feet slackened; a delicate panic came over her face, as with a timid gesture she advanced to where the other stayed seated. Then with a quick glance up the road and down, she took the child in her arms, and without a word sat down by the woman's side.

The crying ceased all at once; and the red flush mounting over Lizzie's cheek did not die.

"God love yer!" said the woman in a whisper. "'E be good to yer! You be the only Christian soul I met, for I dunno' 'ow long."

"When did you feed it last?" enquired Lizzie.

"Lor', I dunno'," answered the other, "I've 'ad 'er now and then, an' 'er's sucked a bit an' cried, an' ain't seemed fed like; an' that's 'ow it's gone on; oh, it 'ave, ever since me and my man's bin on the road."

Lizzie, unseen by the husband, slipped a coin into the woman's hand; her eyes bespoke silence.

Suddenly alarm sprang through her blood. Out from a deep sandy cutting swung a light market-trap into the high-road; three or four men and women sat in it. Concealment was too late, she trusted that there were strangers enough in the world for her secret to be safe. From the cart curious regards were turned on the group seated by the wayside; the blend of squalor and outward respectability was sufficient to make it noticeable.

Lifting up her eyes Lizzie saw Little Alwyn faces

staring at her; one, a woman, set up a shrill laugh. So long as the cart remained in view faces appeared for the backs of heads; away went a fine tale of her to be noised through all the neighbourhood that knew her.

Her breast gave one long rise, and fell again, a cold feeling went into her hands and feet. No outward sign marked the crisis through which she passed. She kept her place till the child had taken its fill. It was almost asleep when she returned it to its mother's arms. The woman's hand touched hers as she rose to go; Lizzie knew that it contained within it the shilling she had given. She smiled a "good evening," saw the man give her a surly nod and stare, and so parted from them, a different woman from the one who a few minutes before had come there, and bearing a different and less excellent name in the language of men.

That night she arrived at her own home, with her child in her arms. Since it was to be, she would face the world. It was significant of the relations between father and daughter that she did not hesitate, when her reason decided her to the step, to bring her so-called shame to her father's roof.

He gave her the greeting of a rough nod; looking at the child, said: "He be a fine 'un," that was all. A more eloquent sign of welcome was when he bade her sit down, and himself set out the meal.

"Muster Tristram's bin enquiring after you," he said presently. "Lots 'e 'ave."

"God bless him!" she said in moved tones; "and you too, Dad," she added, touching the old man's head with her cheek: the nearest to an embrace that had been between them, for all the years they had lived together.

The next day gossip tongues had plain facts to go upon. Before a fortnight was over scandalous connec-

tion was made between the names of Tristram Gavney and Lizzie Haycraft. None seemed to know whence the first rumour of it had sprung, though once started, there were twenty to say they knew so much for a fact.

MacAllister managed to let his word for it seem to come after a general knowledge was abroad. His report had first gone up to high quarters, and was spoken confidentially.

"I've seen them together, not a matter of once or twice, my lady," was his statement, and therewith went a malicious hint of the use certain keys had been put to. He was disappointed to see that credence of his story did not entail disfavour for the offending parties.

For a few days, however, the tale of Tristram's deep damnation hung fire, or was breathed only in secrecy among the elect gossips of the neighbourhood. To the vicar, most guileless of men, that particular rumour came late, and after another, naming a more frequent source of mischief, had been whispered to him. Coming to cheer the convalescence of his chief parishioner and churchwarden, he sought the advice of that good man of the world concerning this latest parish scandal.

As one holding a cure of souls, he was solicitous for the girl's good; had been to her, advising her to carry her damaged reputation elsewhere, and make, as he termed it, a fresh start.

"I am sorry to say," he said, "that I found her obstinate, at last even defiant; her father encourages her in her determination to stay with him. Naturally one would wish to countenance such parental feeling in theory; but Haycraft is not a good guardian for a lonely girl who has already gone astray, and there are circumstances which make it, I say, incumbent that she should go — or marry.

"It so happens she has been, I may say, in my service; if the thing is to be kept a mystery, I feel there is a slur on my — my employment of her, shall I say? I bid her give me the man's name; I would use my influence to make him marry her, if that be possible. Previously she has borne a good character; I conceive that she may have been more sinned against than sinning. She meets me with silence. My answer to that, then, is that she ought to go — you agree with me?"

He had Mr. Gavney entirely with him on that point: he pursued his argument.

"So long as she is here she is the centre of scandal; I have even heard a name suggested, a married man's; I will not repeat it; the mere naming does mischief. Her father is all obstinacy on the point; used strong language, I regret to say, to me; thumped his fist down contradicting me in the rudest way, ordering her to stay. He forgets, I think, that Michaelmas gives me a certain hold over him. My duty is to my parish; I make the renewal of his lease conditional on my counsel being accepted; my counsel I call it, no more. I mean sincerely the girl's good."

A few days later the reverend gentleman who talked thus, got such definite news of the general cry as made him very shy of broaching the subject again to the confidant he had at first chosen. "The girl's good" in the face of social claims became then a somewhat changeable quantity; but more than ever his wish was to get her away; her case had then become the centre not of one but of two problems, and the solution of the one was glaringly at variance with the solution of the other.

CHAPTER XXVII

PRELIMINARY TO A STORM

AN hour of fidgeting waters, perplexed surfaces, and criss-crossing currents precedes, we are told, the terrific gaping of the Maelstrom's maw. Then it is that craft shuttling on a choppy sea, bob this way and that, undetermined, cork-like, helpless to advance or recede from the death which like an inverted bottle-neck is presently to suck them down. Even the wary and forewarned, caught in that tangle of preliminary foam, may not know from signs at what point the reeling of the skein will begin, when the watery spool must perforce draw all things to the control of its furious windings. Yet see the downward nozzle once pointing, how determined becomes the previous flux; as by the jerk of a conjurer's trick, we behold a portent fixed in its causes as the foundations of the eternal hills.

So in the affairs of men small circumstances wait for results, before they reveal their design or assume the aspect of fate. For here is what happens; by a phenomenon of the human brain, nothing under the sun looks new. At the click of the trap, the situation stands suddenly revealed; and "Inevitable!" cries the conscious soul, as though for every Childe Roland his dark tower had stood since the beginning of the world. Thus was Tristram from a long spell of comparative discipline and

submission to be hurled into the rebellion for which he was born.

Behold in a small space the toss of contending circumstances, at first opponent, presently consentient to the spectacle; the visible and invisible array of influences pushing to the mastery of that most assailable of high foolishnesses, a young man's pride. Mark the stage cunningly arranged to a scale that he can fill; applause ready to become provocative; hostile elements waiting to be up and active with the rotten eggs of abuse; and like a second skin, so fit and easy to slip on, the cap and bells of motley tomfoolery, lying handy for a performance wherein self-love and generosity, gracelessness and chivalry, truth and dishonesty, humility and vain-glory, desire and dislike were to stand inextricably mixed.

And, of course, at the root of it all, as ever where youth and hot blood are concerned woman was the mischief. Remember then, that it is through the hero's eye you must consent to see her, if you would understand his madness.

Scandal had now seized hold upon Lizzie's name; suddenly when her danger was past she had declared herself to the world. Brazen she must be. As rumour gave out the circumstances, seated by the roadside, choosing her company from the lowest, and flaunting an office which her case rendered dishonourable, she seemed so indeed.

Tristram had a truer insight at the first word: knowledge of her character made him at once guess the charity of the deed. "Ah! I love her!" cried the inflamed heart of youth, rising up to challenge the scornful verdict of tongues. His idea of the wrong she suffered gave an additional crown to her woman's goodness of heart. He believed her to have been basely stricken; and, too proud to claim redress where none adequate could be given, to have borne with conquering submission a wrong which it

shook his manhood to conceive. Then she had come back into the world with the stain of it removed, wearing a fair name still in the eyes of men; yet at the cry of motherhood had risked the event, and for that act of honest charity now stood ashamed. Had it been for her courage alone Tristram would have vowed himself to her service. "Oh, brave soul! Oh, dear friend, Liz!" his heart cried of her.

He surmised how the world already questioned with ugly interest, and how cruellest of all things now for her to bear would be that serpent truth on which she had set her foot. He sighed hungrily for Lizzie's word, and to have his hand on the man; longed to go to her and claim it; yet, from a scruple and the fiery flush of sex that came over him, knew not how. So, with a mind distraught between pity and rage, going elsewhere, he became conscious of more eyes than usual turning to watch him as he passed through the slummy purlieus of Cob's Hole on his way up to Hill Alwyn.

His lady greeted him with curious effusion, flavouring her speech with ironic remarks that veered artfully about the covered subject of their thoughts. Morals were her theme — those of natural and unprotected youth in particular; she barbed her innuendoes without making them too definitely pointed. Tristram had to understand presently that the current slander of his friend Lizzie was the chaff Lady Petwyn thought fit to throw at him.

He let himself go, crying out on her lack of charity. "You of all women to have so little!"

"What are you tarring *me* for?" she cried, pleasing to impute quite another meaning to his words.

"In other things you pretend to be broad-minded," he cried, in high anger.

"What else have I been now?" she enquired; for in truth lax ethics gave a sort of charity to her scandalous

tongue; her scepticism was only of a virtue about which she cared not one pin. "For youth I've charity without end!" she continued. "I give it countenance with the last feature I possess. Isn't that I receive you proof of it?"

"Now it's your turn with the tar!" he retorted.

"Oh!" she said, grim and amused, "I'm not asking you for your confidences, but you'll please to understand there are tales going about. I suppose we shall hear next that you are marrying. MacAllister seems anxious to be your best man: came up and talked morals to me, 'of all people,' as you would say, till I shut his mouth up."

The hated name sprung Tristram from his seat, eager to be off from the sound of it. Enjoying the accuracy of her power to sting, "Mind you," said the dame, and sent a sharp look after him, "if you ask me, my impression is that you've him to thank for what you'll presently be hearing. If you are peached on, 'tis through that great man's sense of the duty he owes himself. I warn you, he will not brook rivalry."

No further word was allowed her; like a snap on the tail of her last sentence the inflammable youth was off. Lady Petwyn was left with the queer satisfaction of perceiving that some of his anger burned personally against herself; the bully in her was glad to have discovered a way through defences that had so long thwarted her efforts to pierce them. As a matter of fact she had blundered, scoring her point through a mistaken diagnosis of his disorder. At a moment when unusual obtuseness joined itself to her habitual indiscretion, she thought herself most canny in regard to him.

It did not take long for Tristram, with his suspicions awakened, to learn what coupling of names gossip was making. When he went down into Little Alwyn he felt himself a marked man, and noticed with bitter resentment

how smirking went with the knowing looks turned on him in the fresh light of scandal. An insane wish to punch every face that dared meet him with any friendly aspect began threatening to make him a highway danger to the community. By comparison, the reserve and pain which he detected in Mr. Hannam's face on passing him was an almost welcome injustice; he received as curt a recognition from that quarter as he gave in reply to the more cordial greetings of others.

For him it was a new loneliness to be in a world where he wished to be hated. In revenge he was all for flouting it; and had for the moment quarrelled with the only friend who could have kept him at all sensible through the violence of the proud malady that then took hold on him. Had he been champion to no cause but his own, laughter would in a while have rescued him from the ridiculous extremes into which mere loyalty of heart and superabundant courage were presently to plunge him. The poor youth's vices fattened upon his virtues: on that sustenance they helped him to success in the new *rôle* towards which Lady Petwyn had once jeeringly encouraged him.

At home there was no sign as yet of the disturbing rumour. Mr. Beresford Gavney, on the high road to recovery, had not yet gone further than the grounds for recreation and airing. That same evening he and Tristram held their first business consultation over what had been going on in his absence, a thing hitherto interdicted by medical authorities. Before long the father did not fail to notice his son's restlessness and the difficulty he had in fixing his mind on the subject under discussion. With a lively fear that such symptoms meant a revival of Tristram's stubborn inclination to seek a hazardous independence, he decided that the earliest possible moment was the right time for speaking. Newly risen from the bed of sickness on to which his son's undutiful clamour for re-

lease had precipitated him, he might well reckon that physical feebleness would not count against him in a renewal of the struggle. Speaking kindly, indulgently even, and hoping to flatter his son by admitting him frankly to his counsels, he told Tristram the past difficulties of the firm, of others also soon to be faced. Always with an air of scrupulous regret that the point had to be enforced on his attention, he drew him by the thread of his narrative to see the conclusion at which he aimed.

Only that afternoon Gilpinger had been over to report, and had spoken his proud mind of the boy, — his own product, and a very wonder of docility and industry. The Tramp had to learn that he had now become a valuable adjunct to the firm's property: in the sweat of his brow he had earned the very last commendation he wished for.

"Since we spoke last on these matters," said his father, — "some of your remarks were intemperate then, my son: I speak of it only to pardon you; but since then, since all that, you have discovered yourself, you have found out your value. My boy, you make me proud to say you are necessary — I will not say to me — to the firm; now more than ever we require you."

"Not me," said Tristram, "Gilpinger; it's he who has the head."

"I say you," returned Mr. Gavney. "Remember, Gilpinger is an old man; — you did the right thing in recalling him under the circumstances, — but past his best; a year, two years, how long can one count on him?"

"Oh, there's new life in him, now he's back at his desk."

"New wine in an old bottle, a precarious investment. But there is another point, he brings no settled interest into the firm." Mr. Gavney hummed. "In another year you will be of age."

Tristram threw a despondent gaze at his father's face.

"You mean there's money I'm to come into? Is that what you mean?"

Mr. Gavney bowed his head honourably to the impeachment. "My boy, that is what I mean. Every penny of that will be required imperatively; there is the point you have to consider; or rather you have no reason to consider it. As an investment you could not have better. Understand, it will make you practically my partner; at twenty-two you may be in receipt of an income you might marry on."

"It's not income I'm thinking of, sir," said Tristram, "something much more important for me depends on it. It's a case of conscience. Some of this money I must have free; you are welcome to the rest."

Mr. Gavney showed the irritability of convalescence.

"You exhaust me with discussion," he cried. "I have told you, told you already, that it can be no question of amounts; learn clearly to see this, the firm is pledged; in another year money must be forthcoming or we go!" The word sounded cavernously. That his son should abase him to such plain speaking seemed to this man, with his heart set on the future prosperity of his house, a wanton piece of tactlessness.

But the poor youth's heart was set equally on its own projects; he cried out selfishly to be spared. Others had money free for investments, if these were so good: Marcia was already of age.

"What?" he asked, "does Marcia do with hers? Had she not the same as I?"

At this question a flush crossed Mr. Gavney's face; with some embarrassment and a deeper irritation in his tones, he replied, "Your sister has already done freely and without question the thing you wish to avoid; she trusts her father. At this very moment her money is helping to hold

the firm where it stands. What you have to face is this: if you refuse to do what I ask you, my efforts for the last ten, nay twenty years, are wasted. Everything I have done *for* you, mind, depends on you if it is not finally to fail. You withdraw, you stand aside, refusing the inheritance that has been entrusted for you to my hands — you leave a ruined firm, and your family penniless."

"Oh, father, say no more about it!" said Tristram, speaking low, and rising. Why should he listen any more to the dashing of his fair prospects by wordy iterations of the thing he had to accept — "Have the money. Have everything your way for the present. Perhaps at a later date, if I can come to you with plans of my own, you will listen, and give me, then, the right you deny me now — to be free. It's no use talking now. May I go?"

He was allowed to quit the room, feeling bitterly that he had been made to appear ungrateful for favours which he could have prayed to be rid of.

Outside he met Marcia. He took her hand, and bade her come down with him to his own little sanctum. There in the deep gloom of late twilight she sat with him; unable to see his face, she knew by his tone and manner that something had deeply moved him.

Keeping hold of her hand, "Marcie," he said, and repeated "Marcie," hesitating over the thing he wished to say.

"Well, Tris, you know I'm here!" she told him at last.

"Yes," he answered, "but you are a riddle, you puzzle me. I wish ——" he paused. "Do I *know* you, Marcie?"

"No one knows me better, I think! We were twins once, you know, and we haven't quarrelled." The old tag came with fond meaning from the dear girl's lips.

"Ah, that's it! are we still? Can you promise so much?

To-day I heard you were grown up, Marcie; your own mistress — heard it to realise, I mean. But are you as old as I am?"

"You talk like furrowed age. Why, I'm five years older! my sex gives me the right to claim four."

"You are really a woman, then?"

She laughed. "As much as you are a man, Trampie. Say an old maid if you like."

"No, no! there's what I don't want you to be," he said.

"What *do* you want, dear boy?" she leaned on his shoulder to ask.

"Marcie, I want a good woman, a sister — it isn't for myself I mean. You named Lizzie Haycraft the other day; you know she's back. I've not seen her yet, but I wish to. Will you come with me? Oh! Marcie, trust me; I don't ask you to do this for any small reason. There's a good girl in trouble, and you can help her: it's help she wants. It's — it's —— Marcie, they are calling her bad names!"

"Why?"

"There's — oh, you've only to go; you'll see all about it then; you'll understand."

"About Lizzie? What shall I see, Trampie?"

"Just the thing you like best: a baby."

"She has one?" The question came in a whisper of held breath.

He nodded assent.

"But that's wrong!" said the girl.

"Yes, it's wrong. How wrong you can't guess." He threw out his hands unable to explain. "But — but she's a good woman, Marcie! You've only to see her to read that in her. And brave! She would go through fire; it's what she has done, and it's for that they punish her." He told her, as he read it, the tale of Lizzie's charity to the tramp and her child.

"I guess," he said, "because I know her. Is that not enough to show you what sort of a woman she is?"

Marcia took her brother's hand and laid it against her face.

"I'll go, Trampie," said she quite simply.

His thanks were carried less by words than by the warmth of his embrace. "I trusted you from the first, that you would do as much," he said, and broke off suddenly to ask: "Marcie, are you doing this just for me?"

"No, just for her; hardly for you now at all. I mean, I understand." The girl's voice carried her emotion of pity to his ear.

"Then I'm not wrong to have told you about it?"

"I'm glad." After a while she said, "Will you know why?"

"I will indeed, if you will tell me, Marcie."

"Because it has told me something; I didn't know it; I've realised it now — *just* now." She kissed him, saying — "since I came in here, dear, and had your hand."

"What?" he asked, astray for her meaning.

"That I'm not the only grown-up: you as well. And we — why, we are twins again!"

She nodded to him and herself, proud in the certainty of her new possession; and with a full faith in the wisdom contained under her fair brow, she committed herself most readily to his service, nor guessed what a rebel standard of revolt against things old and tried it was which waved over her.

A fortnight later she stood on the outskirts of storm that raged behind closed doors, herself the partial cause. Her demure industry over needlework, a thing she did not love, caused Miss Julia Gavney one day to enquire what it was that employed her so many hours of the day. She was shown dainty garments suitable for small limbs.

"I've a pet dormouse," said Marcia; "these are for it to cuddle into."

The girl's mind was open and without secrecy; she played her aunt merely to tease curiosity, saying finally, "They are for Lizzie Haycraft's baby."

Miss Gavney showed looks of imperilled sanity when, from the lips of a young, innocent, and tenderly-nurtured girl, she heard that most scandalous name of the whole neighbourhood. Marcia was actually proud of her employ. Tristram had told her, she said, that she might be useful.

Julia's remedy was a rash invasion of her brother's privacy. She found the door locked, and clamoured loudly for admission. Her errand brought horrible confirmation of news Beresford Gavney had received within the hour. Exposing the criminous pieces to view, she exclaimed Tristram's name, denouncing him as the root of fresh mischief. Mr. Gavney had baby linen thrown down before his astonished eyes. These were the things which Tristram — she choked repeating her words to underline their horror — which Tristram had procured, commissioned, might not one say debauched, his sister into making for Lizzie Haycraft's offspring. She gathered that Marcia had even been *there!* Where would England's maidenhood show its face next?

Decency stood overwhelmed at the unutterableness of the deed. It was the signal for thunder to rouse and shake through the Gavney establishment.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A BATTLE OF MORALS

TRISTRAM stood before his father. They were alone. "I was told you wished to see me," said the youth.

"I do not wish to see you!" replied Mr. Gavney. "It gives me no pleasure. The point is, I have to. Yes, it seems, what with one thing and another, that I am always to be deprived of my peace through you; that is my fate. Yes, that is what I must bear! Don't look at me like that, sir! Do you know what I have heard to-day?"

"I suppose I do know."

"Yes, you suppose you do! Now it comes out. Now all the world knows of this fine story! Now it's brought to my ears, and I have to ask you; then you suppose you know! Your knowledge, sir, if it only comes now, comes late in the day, let me tell you. The thing's out; your name is being cried about the whole place with that of a woman who has made herself public, a common drab. Is that what you know?"

"Lizzie Haycraft is not common, sir," said Tristram hotly.

"I go by the evidence," retorted his father. "There it's against you. Let that pass, I have not to think of her character; it is the reputation of my name, of my family that concerns me. Your poor mother will be ready to die when she hears of it; she has heard of it; it has aged

her ten years; it is a blow she can't recover from, ever, ever; you have done that for her — you, her son!"

"She has not had it from me," said Tristram.

"No! you conceal it till concealment is useless. This thing as it stands is scandalous: how does it come to be said? Why have you let it go on? It is not to: I say it must be denied. Decency demands. You hear me?"

"Deny it, sir, by all means!" said Tristram.

"It seems you yourself have not taken the trouble."

"I have never been asked the question. If I had been, I should."

"It must be done, and quickly! the thing is, I suppose, a mere rumour; you should not have allowed it a moment's life. Does the woman want money?"

"Of me? Lizzie Haycraft? I have not offered it; if she needed it she knows me well enough. I think she will take nothing from any man. These lies, sir, which you call rumour, have not started from her. Understand, sir, I love her; yes, she is my friend. Think ill of that if you must. She's the truest soul I know!"

"I would rather hear nothing of that: keep it to yourself! What I have in mind is the disgrace you have brought on your name in public by such friendship."

"Tell me definitely, sir, of what you accuse me."

"Of the disgrace, which you must needs flaunt before the world. Of disgracing yourself; of disgracing me; your mother — all of us. In your own place, where your name should stand high, where you have your family duty to think of; you, you — I must imagine from your words that you take the blame to yourself — you lead a girl into wrong — ruin, and then have allowed the thing to become a scandal."

"If you believe that, why don't you tell me to marry her?"

"You look at me like that to insult me; you speak to

insult me! It seems easy for you to hold your head high and speak as if the shame were anywhere but on your own shoulders. If you had a conscience you would be silent."

"If you would rather I were silent, sir, I will say nothing!"

"What then? Will you pretend now that the blame is in the other direction? How did you come to mix yourself with such a person?"

"Nothing shall be said to me against her! Believe what you like of me. As soon as the thing started — the rumour I mean — I did one thing that should have counted more than any denial from me: I took Marcia to see her, and she goes now of her own accord."

"You dare look me in the face and tell me that! Your own sister, a young girl, to a woman named for loss of character; you *took* her, you say?"

"I asked her to go; she came, we went together; since then she has gone alone."

"Then what came before me to-day was not the full extent of your villainies. What? to shield yourself you make use of your sister, of one you are bound to protect from the very knowledge of such things. Is my son so base?"

"Listen here, father!" cried Tristram, "you will have to hear me now. Either this thing is true or is not true. You tell me it is to be denied, that I am to deny it, yet you speak as if you believed it all the time. Believe what you like then: you did so before ever speaking to me, I think! But it's late now to begin asking me questions, and expecting me to tell you truth which you don't want. Only I say this, and with my whole heart I believe it's true. This girl whom you sling names at, this poor Lizzie Haycraft, whose name has been taken from her, I am still proud to call my friend. What wrong she has had to suf-

fer, wrong without remedy, Heaven knows, I only guess. With what courage she has borne it I do know; and for that I honour her. Father, believing what you do of me, bid me marry her, and I will be glad to obey. If she would have me, I swear I would be ready to take her before all the world, for I have not yet seen a nobler woman on this earth. But if you would have me do anything less, your advice, like enough, will only drive me the opposite way. Think me as guilty as you like, perhaps you have that right; you have had some means of judging of my character, and there are times I own when I have not behaved well to you. All the more, let that stand between you and any uncharitable thoughts of her. Make your own flesh and blood do right before you begin handling others. Of her you have no right to speak ill; whatever is wrong in her, according to your view, goes with wrong in me. Remember, if you speak to me of her, there is no woman I honour more — not Marcia, not my own mother even! Now say what you like."

Mr. Gavney heard the sound of a fury that carried no meaning to his brain; this voice of the young man's passion came to him out of an unknown world.

"Are you mad?" he asked simply, when his son had ended.

Tristram read into his eyes. Black rage urged him into a retort, echo to the conviction he found there.

"Mad and a liar!" he answered. "You would believe nothing I said now!"

His father was inspired to reply, "Go, then, and break your mother's heart; you have it in your power to do so. I say no more."

He put out his hand forbiddingly. Tristram was not to speak — he felt himself dismissed. Directing his thoughts to that gentle presence into which he was bidden to go was like an exchange from some churning torrent of

mud and foam to a cistern of sweet waters. In obedience to the literal command, the last thing actually expected of him, he went up before an hour was over to his mother's room. There, under the shadow of blinds, he saw her resting on a couch. She had heard his footstep; her face turned upon its cushions for his coming; out came the dear hands to meet him, impatient to have hold of him. She believed in her power to cure him; what she had been told within the hour convinced her only the more.

"My dear, oh, my dear!" she said, and drew his head down.

At once she felt his body shaken between her arms; her boy he was; and even in a mind filled for rebuke she congratulated herself with a mother's triumph. Had she not told her husband it should be so?

"Leave him to me!" had been her word.

To the boy in her arms she let silence for a while be her prayer. "Comprehend me!" it said; "I have love, compassion, understanding." His devout heart was ready to admit two-thirds of her claim. Oh, the comfort of that breast.

Gently her voice whispered to him: —

"Oh, my dear, what a sorrow you have brought me!"

He drew himself away from her embrace to say: —

"Mother, do you, too, believe everything that you are told?"

"Not all, not all!" she answered. "I can see mistakes and pardon them. I will believe what *you* tell me," she added in invitation to his confidence.

"You are the first to say that to me!" murmured the boy, turning her palm to his lips.

"I am listening," she answered.

"My father ——" he said, and stopped.

"You have grieved him, my dear!"

"I must; he will not believe what I say."

"Trust me, I will make your peace with him!" she said. It was not the thing he yearned for.

"Let him think what evil about me he chooses!" cried Tristram. "But you, mother, do you think I have been so base, so treacherous — I have heard of men who can — as to do this that they accuse me of: to ruin an honest girl's life, and then leave her in her trouble, for fingers to point scorn at?"

The effort to say even so much was extreme for him; he found himself bashful, his tongue stumbling for an escape in words that should not shock her ears. Alas! when we must veil our mother-speech from the one being to whom it should run freely.

With fond misunderstanding Mrs. Gavney held an unknown heart to her breast.

"I do not think that," she said. "Looking at you, my dear, I am slow to think it. Yes, yes, even *I* know, it is so with the young. Often one who is bad has a great power over the innocent; and the harm comes before they know there is any wrong almost."

To the boy's mind, so much as there was of unexpected insight and knowledge in her speech, did but link her to the world's view. He hardened a little while she lay holding him.

"Mother, whom are you charging now?" His eye on her grew stern; his tone made her afraid; she had been warned what she might hear.

"My dear," she pleaded, "I have said very little of blame."

Tristram attacked the thing she had left unsaid.

"Of me? No! If you are going to speak evil of that poor girl, let me go; I cannot bear it! There is no wrong in her; she had no chance. Why accuse when you have no proof?"

He heard the dearest of titles used to instruct him

where the wrong lay in her. Lizzie with her child at her breast — in brave betrayal of her case — leaned to him with claims for chivalrous tenderness. Apart from what his mind told him of her, testimony to which he clung, he believed that the whole world was without charity in these things. His own eye had seen things to make him generous; his ear had caught sounds. Once under a blue evening of stars, fainting where the moon rose bringing night, he had heard lovers' farewells spoken under a hedge of may; the man away to seek work and no chance for marriage between them yet. He had heard the man's moan and the woman's, as of dumb beasts in pain, saying chiefly that they were young and hard put to it by fate; and the trembling balance then between right and wrong, as social man must hold such, and the hardly won self-denial of two bodies bound for a while to part, had taught him charity toward all such cases.

The name, now spoken by his own mother as a circumstance of shame, he held in such honour, wild theories rose in him that the whole world should give way to it. Honest manhood he thought should meet nature's claim and allow no stigma to rest on the production of the race. He repeated his belief that a good woman was the subject of their thoughts, one incapable of such wrong as was hinted against her. His hand sought response from the one it held, now when his words were making her afraid.

"No wrong," he added, "that a man who held woman's honour as high as his own should not be ready to set right."

She shrank scared at that, her husband's cry of astonishment and alarm still drumming on her brain. Tristram, she was told, had almost threatened to marry the girl. Could she have believed that it was a case of innocence

wronged, she would have sided with her son's conscience, if not to the extent of the actual atonement he proposed; but she saw just enough of the truth to keep her from that extent of succour demanded by his pride. Weak, tempted, she could believe him, but no tempter of one not dipped in the wickedness of men's ways. With a full wish to believe what he told her, she attached a minimum meaning to his words, and thought that his own generosity deceived him as to the wrong he had done.

She saw his eyes full of moisture, tender and pleading, looking to find a companion in hers. Weakness set sobs to her speech.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, "pray to do right; do not be rash! It is not always a simple thing to set wrong right."

Her hands were caught and passionately kissed; speaking so she seemed to belong to him. That was not the world speaking; at last he had some one with him; wonderful that it should be she!

"Mother," he cried, "it is not true; there, there I tell you now! I have never done such a wrong as that. I have never betrayed innocence. I have nothing to boast of myself, but I have not done that!"

She believed him still. "I was right," she told herself, and could speak strongly then, against his pride and the threats he had used to dismay his father. "I will see him for you," she said, "I will explain!" and wondered why his face should suddenly set hard. He rose and stood behind the couch, leaning over her.

"Yes, yes, mother, do as you like," he said, and let her say on. He understood her now; and this, too: that another had been there before him, speaking in her ear. The thought brought bad blood back to his heart. Pride returned and shut his lips; he would not speak again.

Feeling her forehead kissed from above, Mrs. Gavney

reached up her hand for his, that she might soften what sounded from her lips like hard words. It was not taken; she turned to find herself left alone.

To her boy's father, "Be gentle with him!" she said; "I think this is the first time he has done wrong, and he knows too little of the wickedness of the world. He blames himself, and will not have it spoken of another. That is a good fault, it shows a generous heart."

The generous heart was at that moment engaged in dealing itself one more wound. Compromise had grown hateful in his eyes. He wrote to Lady Petwyn, begging her to think no more of the plans she had made to help him. It was now out of his power to keep to their bargain; he found he had not the means, yet could not alter his mind where matters of principle were concerned. He preferred a friendship which left them free to differ, rather than office where he would be bound by her judgment. The letter was stiff, and a little ungracious. Lady Petwyn snapped her acceptance: his decision, she told him, settled the matter.

Having dealt himself that stroke, he hoped that it proved the honesty of his heart; thus bucklered in pride he stood up to fight society and the world alone.

CHAPTER XXIX

VIRTUE IN A SWELLED HEAD

FROM Hill Alwyn Lady Petwyn looked abroad upon a sight that warmed all that was worst in her blood: the rampant youth who had flouted her favours for the sake of a crude theory was now making an egregious fool of himself. To have full news of his progress she condescended to glean gossip from the flightiest tongues, and with a venomous charity for folly accepted whatever was told her. To the culprit himself she remained very friendly; inviting him to come up for periodical inspection, she traced the stages of his disorder with a keen relish. Early in the game she had declared herself on his side, as in a way she was. What, as a friend, she asked, did he wish her to say for him: was the thing true or untrue? Tristram did homage to a direct question; he wished her to say nothing for him: as for "the thing" — it was not true.

The old rogue accepted his word, not in the least believing it. It was a gentleman's duty in certain cases to tell lies; the amusing thing was that he should regard this as one of them. His gratitude should have touched her; instead, she wondered whether he thought her a fool, though she delighted in the audacity with which he put the rest of the world in that category. "It seems to me," she said, "that you are fighting civilisation and the whole history of England, from the Reformation on."

After capering from pillar to post, from the paternal to the spiritual authority, Tristram would come upon her to blaze off his indignation. He was demanding value for an insult he would not stoop to refute. "I'm not questioned, I'm accused," he said. "They say it is so: very well, then, if that is their view, let them have the honesty to act as if they thought it." She believed verily that a claim to matrimony was the bee that buzzed in his bonnet; and divined triangular tactics taking place, one pursuing, two elusive. "Face it out with a clean conscience," she told him, when he hinted of attempts to stifle him. He wrung her hand and thanked her: she had fanned the pugilist to a fresh round.

The vicar had at last to be "not at home" when Tristram kept coming to propound horrible theoretical cases, wishing to be told what, in this, that, or the other, was a man's Christian duty. Mr. Hannam felt bound to remember that he was not only a Christian but a neighbour, when delivering his answer. He endeavoured to evade a decision, by deprecating so young a man entangling himself in such moral conundrums.

"Take it that the case were my own?" said Tristram. "You hear what's said."

"Your duty would be to your father first, I think," responded the vicar cautiously. "You are under age."

The youth asked whether coming of age were an ordinance of the Church.

He was reminded that marriage had its legal as well as its moral side. Minority involved an obstacle.

Tristram thought that parents as well as sons might fail to see what was their clear duty, and might need discreet and learned ministry to show it them. "Will you meet my father?" he asked. "Will you speak to him?"

"Do you desire to give me any message to him?"

"I have put the same thing to him as to you. He says I insult him."

"Probably you have shown temper," observed Mr. Hannam, and checked all further discussion; it was impossible, he said, for him to come between father and son. "Your duty towards your father is best learned at home; you need not come to me to define it: you make me suspect your motives."

The absurd youth gave him every reason for so doing with his next question: "Why is Lizzie Haycraft turned off from work here? Why are you turning out her father?"

"Why," asked the vicar, "are these subjects any concern of yours?"

"I am friends with them."

"It would be well if you were not. Some friendships lead to trouble. Over the whole of this business some one has very much to answer for."

Wind of this came to Lady Petwyn in a request from Tristram that she would find Lizzie Haycraft employment.

"Find your Beale Isoud employment?" enquired the dame; "what does she do? Needlework?"

"Yes, that, and washing."

"Of dirty linen in public? It seems you help her. Very well, send her along!"

"You mean it?"

She did. Lizzie, cast off at the Vicarage, was taken in at the Hall. Mr. Hannam remonstrated; Lady Petwyn bade him be charitable. Tristram had the proud feeling of having scored a point against the enemy.

He saw an enemy in nearly everybody now: they were as numerous as his friends were few. Marcia had been sent away with her mother out of reach of his contaminating influence; Raymond was still absent; MacAllister

unscathed, went on still in wickedness, a sign to Tristram that his mission was as yet unaccomplished.

For relief, one day, he became a truant from work, and flew over to the Sage, who had begun asking for him once more. He found him feeble, but as full as ever of cranks and petulant reproof of him.

At the tender pressure of the old man's hands on his shoulders, the poor youth was ready to lift up his voice and weep: the relief of level companionship in an elder who yet differed from him in most things was so great.

They talked on many subjects, of much very near to the trouble the young man's pride had brought on him. The elder discerned a spirit, befogged by the fumes of some passion, tilting at windmills. He counselled peace as the best wisdom for youth, because the hardest to attain.

"But fighting must be right sometimes?"

"Yes, under a higher authority."

"Is not conscience that?"

"Conscience may enlist you in a cause. To assert it singly, if literal fighting is what you mean, brings you down to the duel."

"Down? Is not the duel sometimes the only right way?" asked Tristram. The fighter rang in his tones.

"The duel," said the Sage, "was a necessary institution in its day; it has lost its use now in civilised countries. Like the mastodon, it is no longer needed in the jungles of the cooler sphere we live in. Yesterday, fifty years ago that is to say, it had become immoral; it has now sunk lower, and has become ridiculous.

"Of its immorality here is an instance out of my own youth, when the transition from the immoral to the ridiculous was taking place. A man of my native town, with more than a finger in trade, had married a too fair lady, his superior in rank. Out of the shop he was pre-

sentable: for her sake the upper quality would sit in his wife's parlour and drink tea. If her husband came in, they merely shortened their stay, without at once rising to go. He took no offence at it; and was never in a hurry for recognition.

"One young roysterer, a buck of the county, thought the lady 'devilish fair,' rumour said she was flattered by his attentions; anyway, for her sake, he became intimate with the shopman, sat down at his table, borrowed money of him, and at last gets caught making round love to his wife.

"What does our shopman do when he hears of it? Shut his door on a scoundrel, and so let the thing go? Not for a moment! Bitten with gentility he sends him a challenge, and, being disdained, whips his man in the street one quiet night before a few witnesses; perhaps chooses his time shrewdly, when the gallant is in drink and unsteady on his legs. Gives as his reason that the fellow had come drunk, and used unseemly language in his wife's presence; all of which was literally true. When a leading gentleman of the place backs him up, it becomes certain that the meeting must come off. This gentleman, who offers to second him, says 'What can you handle?' and is reminded that the other side has the choosing of weapons, himself remaining the challenger: an elementary piece of knowledge from an honest fellow swaggering at gentlemanly revenge. The shopkeeper owns he can hit a bull's-eye if it be a tub across the breadth of his back-yard; and can make the preliminary passes; that is about all. He puts his point frankly: 'Sir, I have no wish to kill, or to be killed. But my wife is a lady born; and, as her husband, I am to be treated as a gentleman. My opponent is an expert, I am told. If I can get through his guard I will; if not, let him pink me where he likes, and I'll carry a scar which my wife will

regard honourably.' The remark shows, perhaps, why the poor fellow insisted on fighting.

"In the end they met. Not being born to such things, and feeling his courage in him, the gallant shopman must needs swagger a little. His opponent merely plays with him, and feigns a miss or two. 'Bad!' says the trader, and hacks out; and 'Bad!' again. Pitying on-lookers can scarcely refrain from laughing.

"The right thing, you'll say, was to disarm him; but the other, growing careless, fumbles a ward, barely escapes being touched, and is told 'Bad!' for the third time. Being true, it stings him; this talking target shall be permitted no longer.

"At the sight, one of the seconds exclaims in irrepressible pity against so adroit a cruelty. 'Good!' cries the excellent shopman, and drops choking with his own blood.

"Where was honour in that miserable affair?"

Tristram thought the wife would find in widowhood a husband worthy to be sorrowed over.

"It is to be feared," said the Sage, "that her grief only began a month after she had married the other party."

"Yet he died finely, and like a gentleman!" asserted the youth.

Replied the Sage, "Or like puss, when the field's after him, leading his own funeral procession. I doubt if 'gentleman' was added to his epitaph. And you see how little his gentlemanly effort saved his wife from a fate which, as a shopman, he might have averted. One scarcely knows whether to laugh or cry over him."

"I'd never laugh!" declared Tristram. "I think that to meet his man was the right instinct. Are you against fists even?"

"Fists, ah no!" replied the Sage, "I grant certain

insults call for personal chastisement; man is still a fighting animal, when he protects the honour of his women. But he need not risk murder and suicide in keeping scoundrels their proper distance. The fist of an honest man may sometimes do the work of the finger of God, and write truth on the face of cowardice."

If Tristram had come to the Sage with any idea of pistols all round, as a cure for injuries in the cause he was championing, this praise of fists may have helped to bring his histrionics to a saner level. But were these to be his remedy, he had needed the equipment of Briareus to smite all the mischievous mouths that now wagged tongues at him.

On his return home he found that a stroke had been prepared for his folly which he had not just then calculated on. To get him away from a neighbourhood where his presence did mischief, where every day threatened to see him plunging into yet madder course, Mr. Gavney had taken means to snap off his independence at the roots. Within a fortnight London was to swallow him up; and for the one year his father spoke of he understood it was to be banishment. After that, if he were wise, he would accept the higher training which the opportunity afforded, and remain to acquire that culture in commerce which only a great business house could supply him. He saw in black and white documents practically binding him; his father's name to them, making him a chattel of trade; he was reminded that in the eyes of the law he was yet an infant. Shrewdest stroke of all was word of his mother returning with Marcia in a few days to give him his send-off under a veneer of harmony. He detected the leash and muzzle, to one in his present mood a form of constraint difficult to endure. He spoke on the matter with a cold calm he did not feel.

"You had better delay their coming, sir, if it be for me; I may decide not to go."

Mr. Gavney answered, "That is not left to you for discussion."

His retort, "I did not name discussion, decision was my word!" was uttered in a manner with which his father was now becoming familiar.

Blow for blow, and to promote with passionate effrontery the rivalry of incompatible codes, was now the longing of his heart. Told he was a child, he was childishly set on proving himself a man; pride forbade him to quit the scene, and the cause he had emptily championed without some ringing counter-stroke. Lizzie's honest name still stood needing to be vindicated. Fiercely to his head rushed the resolution to put theory in practice, and practically, by the same act, to give justification to the talkers of scandal.

"I love her!" he cried, to fight down a doubt which threw ridicule on the scheme; and did not know that it was self-love which carried him at such speed along Randogger Edge, to win a point that would stagger those who traded on his infancy.

CHAPTER XXX

TRISTRAM ENCOUNTERS OBSTACLES

TRISTRAM found Lizzie in deep depression; the time for leaving her old home was near. The uprooting of her father from the one spot which could have kept him settled for his old age, was the thing which weighed most upon her mind.

"I'd go," she said in recounting her trouble to Tristram, "I would go willingly, if that 'ud end the matter; but Dad's pride's bound up in it now; he'll not stay on any condition if he can't keep me as well. He talks savage at me if I mention it; but at night I see him looking hard when he's cleaning his guns, and I know he's minding how soon he'll have to leave it all and go. Dear Mr. Tristram, the thought of it do wear him so; it's only a month now between this and then. Have 'e not noticed how thin he be getting?"

"Much may happen in a month, Liz," he replied to comfort her. He spoke truth, though events went far from the thing that he planned while he spoke.

The little cause of so much trouble lay fast asleep on his mother's arm. Tristram turned to gaze on the unconscious face; as he did so the girl's eyes were on his. Thinking of what he wished to say, with stare grown intent and fixed, he was aware that a shawl had been drawn between him and the object of his regard. Looking up he met in Lizzie's gaze a half-frightened enquiry;

his glance went down again on the covered head. He understood.

Generous pity swelled in his blood; he laid his hand on hers. "Liz," he asked softly, "haven't you given him a name yet?"

She shook her head, eyeing him still.

"Don't you mean to?" he enquired.

"I would like ——" she said, and stopped. After some hesitation she added, "A name did ought to mean something; once you did tell me what your name meant, and the thought of it's come back. 'Sorrow-born,' you said. That would have done well enough for him. Some day, when I'm right away from here, I would like to give him your name; I've not had a better friend."

Suddenly as she envisaged the objection, her face grew stained. Before she could cover her remark, he said, "That is just what I have come to ask."

Again she shook her head at him; confusion made her look down.

"I shouldn't ever have named such a thing," she murmured; "I forgot folk 'ud be saying things about you if I did."

He was surprised at her ignorance. "They do say it!"

"They do! Oh!" A spasm shook her features; shame fought with anger, and anger fell to ruinous weeping. With heaving shoulders she turned and leaned her face to the wall.

"Oh, my friend!" she cried in shaken speech, "do 'e go and leave me! I only bring pain on them as is kind to me. Go! Don't ever come near me again."

She was more moved than Tristram had ever seen her; more hurt now for him than she had ever been for herself. Her generous grief accused him for having let word of it go.

"Liz," he cried, "I shouldn't have told you this, but for the other thing that I wanted to say. Listen! I ask you: will you give your boy my name? Yes, the whole of it, I mean — the right to it; yourself too? Do you understand?"

She turned slowly round to face his meaning. He gave her no chance but to see clearly what it was. "Liz, dear, say yes!" he cried, and having his arms about her, had the child as well.

She pushed him back with one hand, forbidding him with all her force, though her face held no anger.

"But, Liz," he urged, discovering rejection in the act, "do you think I don't love you, then?"

"I know you do," she answered. "You hadn't got to speak it for me to know that. You be the truest friend I have in the world, Mr. Tristram."

"I want the right to be!"

"You have it; I can't give 'e more."

"Oh, Liz," cried Tristram, trying to measure his chagrin, "won't you believe I want you?"

"It's not true," she answered. "You want to be good to me; that's a different thing. Don't 'e say no more; this is not the way you can do it. I tell 'e it could never be!"

Dissatisfied he opened his lips to plead further the cause of pride. "I ask 'e," she said quickly, "not to speak of it again! no, no; it pains me too much. I can't even thank 'e with any word that'll say what I feel."

He cried out, drawing his hand back from the pressure of her lips. "Oh, Liz, how you shame me!" he muttered, suffering sharp scruples over such a salute.

"And you me, dear, dear friend," murmured the girl. "God can never bless you enough now to please me! But you'll not talk of this any more. Let all be as it is!"

Her simple act of homage had silenced him. What

he said during the rest of their interview was wholly sensible, and much more kind in fact.

Hearing that old Haycraft was up in the paddock at the back of the cottage he went across to have a talk with him, and finding him busy at the repair of his tackle, lent a hand to the work. They conversed of indifferent matters, or sat silent, not speaking what lay in their thoughts. Tristram noticed that the old man's lips had a new trick, shaping continually at words unuttered; his old habit of equable reserve had broken down under the slow fever that, through blood and brain, was wasting him. Lizzie had spoken truly; his body was showing the gaunt framework of its former strength, and the old fire of his eye was slow in kindling under the shaggy brow.

Suddenly Haycraft, conscious that he was watched, cast on his companion a searching regard, fixed a rigid mouth, and laid down his work.

"Speak out, Ben!" said Tristram. "What is it? You've something on your mind."

"Like enough, I have," retorted the other. "So've you; both on us 'a got it; it sticks an' it 'ont come away."

"Some things do take a time, Ben," said Tristram.

"Time?" returned the old man; "that's the thing I can't wait for; there ain't much time for me! I be a-goin', I says to meself, I be a-goin'! Soon I'll be gone!"

"Where do you go, Ben? Isn't it about time you were looking round?"

"That be true, Muster Tristram; it be time, and the time be gettin' on; and I've bin lookin' round; never a day but I've bin lookin' round. And now I be come back on the thing I thought foremost, 'fore ever I said a word to 'e. Muster Tristram, there be summat you *do* know."

"But I know nothing: not a thing!"

"You've a name in yor mind, if you chose to speak it."

"In my mind? yes, Ben, but I can't go on it. If only I could!"

"You think my girl's had wrong done her?"

"Yes, Ben, that I could swear," whispered Tristram, and his eye grew fierce.

Haycraft pitched out a great oath. "And so here be we two," he cried, "both much of a mind, and you with a name as you could name, and nothin' to come of it; and my time welly nigh over. Muster Tristram, I must be at the rights of this 'fore I go!"

"Your way to the rights may bring you out wrong, Ben," the boy warned him. "If you must tackle it, best go quick and straight; face your man. Yes, if I could be by, I'd trust to the instincts of the two of us."

"You mean to know whether he spoke true or lied?"

"I mean that."

"So now, will you name the man to me, then?"

But Tristram had still a scruple; his code of honour was more punctilious towards an enemy than a friend; and his head was cool enough to tell him that vengeance in Haycraft's hands would not stop on the side of mercy. He must be sure. Forlornly he had to admit to himself that he held no proof. So for a while he kept his own counsel, promising to see Haycraft again in a few days' time.

"I say, Ben, don't be in a great hurry!" he said, laying kind hands on the old man. "Mind you, it's Lizzie you hurt most, if you get yourself into a scrape."

The old fellow's ears were half deaf to him. Tristram left him sedentary, at his task. Looking back, he noticed the more deliberate movements and the deeper stoop of the head, giving sign of faculties and sinews less immediately responsive to his call on them than of yore. From

his speech also the boy had realised how suddenly his friend had aged; it was with a sad heart that he turned away.

Wrath in his heart at the position of affairs at home drove Tristram further afield. That evening he supped with Daddy Wag-top, and delighted him thereafter with readings from his beloved classics. To confer so much pleasure to a simple heart lulled his sick soul. "Shall I come over and stay with you for a few days?" he enquired of his host, and saw the light he anticipated come into the lonely man's eyes. In a high mood for asserting his threatened independence he quitted home the next day, leaving conjecture to work alarm as to his whereabouts. For his mother's sake he posted a line to Marcia, hinting that he would return when his mind was made up on the London project. Thus the news came back to his father at second hand, revealing yet a new aspect of his son's rebellion against authority.

For a week the culprit employed himself very happily between farm labour and classical readings; Bagstock's head wagged merrily all day over his great good fortune. In the evenings his guest read to him, so assiduously that the yeoman was seized with a veritable belief that his library contained rare things attractive to the literary mind.

"You are the only master I do Latin with now," said Tristram. "I come to you to feel young." He could have stayed for ever.

A wish to look up at his mother's window and know whether she had returned; to throw up to Marcia's and be let in for a midnight conference, and have a scolding from her kind tongue; to let himself out again in the early morning, to go over to Hill Alwyn and steal a ride; in fact a general wish for social contact once more came at a week's end to disturb the contentment which had

lasted so long. He spoke his mood to his host, naming such strange hours for his going and return, that the yeoman for the first time had an inkling that he entertained a clandestine guest. He put the question: Did Mr. Gavney know whose roof was honoured by his son's presence?

"I have not told him," said Tristram; "if he chooses to find out, he may."

Benjamin Bagstock received a shock. Reverence of a father was with him an infatuation; it ran equal with his craze for the classics. He sighed, stumbled for speech, and could not, 'twixt affection for his dear young benefactor and his creed of filial duty find mild words honest enough for his homily on parental claims.

Tristram perceiving a yeasting of conscience under cover of many kind words, bade him be comforted. "I go to-night," he said. "If I come back it shall be with permission."

He reckoned that to promise so much meant a longish farewell to Daddy Wag-top's company.

He gave him good measure at parting, in the way of Latin hexameters. They held sitting in the low farm-parlour till a late hour; no rank dissolute vintage appeared to trouble the feast; the Tramp had long since instituted cider in its stead. He had sworn that apple-orchards grew round Olympus, and that sliced apples floated on the cups of the Gods when with Peleus they feasted. The Greek origin of cider thus set in evidence, backed by a twisted classical allusion, Bagstock ever after held the beverage in high honour, and let it be the drink wherewith Tristram thereafter crowned his quotations. His musty old Madeira went under. The fable gave contentment to two, and the farmer's board becoming thereby hospitable in fact, as well as fancy, led them into late habits.

Tristram read till eleven sounded. When he rose to go, wind blew and rain struck the windows, telling of weather without that had gone unperceived. Bagstock, with courtesy before morals, prophesied a wet night, and begged him to stay.

"No," said Tristram, with a glance out at the sky, "it will clear." Having set his word on it, some instinct held him; a notion of the "evil chance" cropping up again, he wished to get away.

Bagstock's word was the truer. The close tortuous paths of Randogger kept the traveller fairly dry, though in the tree-tops whispered a continuous mizzle of rain. Crossing the open from Randogger Edge, and thence under Parson's Coppice, to the accompaniment of a thorough drenching, he could see the Haycrafts' lonely cottage still showing a light, and wondered why they should be up so late.

Along the Hill Alwyn footpaths he was again protected from weather that had now settled miserably till the small hours; the air had by this time grown darker, showing that behind the blistering grey clouds the moon had gone its setting.

Suddenly he was conscious of an obstacle in the path, — too late. He stumbled and found himself across a man's body.

Living or dead, he wondered: most likely only drunk. He heard a groan, not like a drunken man's.

"Who are you?" he cried; and getting silence, scraped a light with difficulty from half damp matches, and saw in a brief spurt of flame Ben Haycraft with disfigured visage looking at him; a death's head, still staring and conscious; nothing moved in it but the eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI

TRISTRAM EXTENDS PROTECTION TO AN ENĒMY

SICK at heart, Tristram beheld the shape of his fears.

"Ben!" he cried, when darkness fell again between them. "Dear man, what has been done to you? Are you much hurt?"

Receiving no answer, he laid hands on the inert mass, and groped to find how much life lay in it. By the uniform moisture of the garments he guessed the fallen man must have lain exposed there for over an hour. The Tramp's mind was now all to fetch help, for alone he could not carry a man of Haycraft's weight. To take stock of his injuries he struck a second match, and saw enough to know what immediate bandaging was needed.

The light fell on a burnt-out end. "What's o'clock?" came in a voice like that of an awakened sleeper, or as the enquiry of a brain fuddled with drink.

To the reply telling of midnight come, his "Yo be Muster Tristram?" showed clearer perceptions.

"Yes, it's me," answered the boy, and felt a hand thrown feebly up against him, astray, and borne down again by its own weight.

"Good lad!" muttered the old man as their hands met and clasped.

Placing his cap under the damaged head that it might have softer lying, he tore into rough bandages a shirt

from the wallet he carried; and did his best to adjust them to the wounded part.

Haycraft seemed unconcerned with his doings, his mind all abroad on matters outside his present condition. As pressure on the weights of a clock adds impetus to its going, so it seemed did the drag on his physical forces bring about a quicker working of the brain.

"Them 'ounds! Where be they gone to?" he started muttering; and in the darkness dry and low his voice went on. "Did yer see any on 'em? Muster Tristram, haven't yer seen ere a one? I put me sign on 'em all; I'd know 'em again. There was three; ah! there was four on 'em at one time, but I did for *'im.*"

"Who were they, Ben? Couldn't you tell?" asked Tristram, still bandaging.

"Look about, lad, look about, and you'll find 'em; they can't be got far!" The husking voice spoke in an exalted tone, impressive coming out of the blackness of night, and from a bulk of body so weak, so drenched, it seemed already to belong to the soil on which it lay.

"I tell 'e how it was," he went on. "They won't tell 'e for themselves — one won't. I come along, carrying my Liz, and the time gettin' dark; up they leps out of nowhere, an' behind comes down a knock on me 'ead. Then I sets Liz to one side. There's three up afore me; two on 'em goes down; one stays there thinkin' whether he'll get up again; thinks a good while, 'e do. Then one — 'e come behind me again, and all three of 'em on me, I goes down. Man under me 'e outs with 'is knife. 'Oh, yer will, will yer?' sez I, and quicker nor 'e knows 'e gets his knife back into him, and kingdom come into the bargain."

The Tramp listened bewildered; this tale he had heard before, of a day when Haycraft was twenty years younger; aye, and had seen on the brawny body the scars of that fight.

"Shut talking, Ben!" said he. "Quiet's best for you now!"

Under him in the darkness the withered voice still went on, not heeding his words, drawing the narrative to its known goal: a desolate and wintry breath, lifting like dead leaves the ghosts of a buried field.

"That fellow," Haycraft took up the thread of his story, "the one as had got his knife back again; well, they others seein' so much done, an' havin' had sommat their-selves, they sheers off, they do. And for 'im, where I done it, there I puts 'im to rot. Little Liz, 'er a lookin' on an' crowin' all the time — Just done it as you come along. 'So that's ended,' sez I. And now where be me legs, I wonder?"

Tristram was giving but half an ear to such talk. "Your head's been cut open," said he, "and you've been bleeding like a pig; I've got to get you home."

"Aye," murmured the old man, "cut open, be I? 'Twan't done with a knife, though. 'Twas the red 'un done that; he was the one as fought fair. 'Man to man,' sez I. That must 'a bin after the rest; and 'ow a come to get the better o' me. ''Twas you!' sez I to 'im; and 'e swears a dommed lie that 'twas another. When 'e outs yor name, 'Dommed liar!' sez I, and struck 'im. Where be Liz got to now?"

"She's at home waiting for you to come in," said Tristram. "Ben, you lie quiet here while I bring her. You must be got home, and you can't do it on your own legs. Are you comfortable enough to be left?"

"A wants Liz," said the old man.

Tristram gave a parting pressure to his hand and ran. After brief absence he returned, with Lizzie, carrying restoratives and a lantern. They found the old man dazed and scarcely conscious of their presence; his tongue no longer shaped sentences that could be understood. Be-

tween them they propped him up, and staggering under the weight of his mighty bones, bore him home, and to the bed from which he was never to rise.

Tristram went off at once to summon medical aid: he had more than four miles to go, and the stir of birds in the damp woods was already indicating the close approach of dawn when he and the doctor were set down at Haycraft's door.

Returning then to the wood, for the lantern and the things he had left thrown down, he came unexpectedly on his own cap. He put his hand to his head; whose was he wearing? He pulled the thing off and examined it. "Ah!" he murmured, "the red 'un."

He searched further; no other evidence came to hand.

Before night the old man lay dead; loss of blood and failure of the heart's action combined to account for the overthrow of that tough frame.

During those hours of his sinking strength he had but once opened his eyes on his watchers, and then twice broke silence to say, "The red 'un, he fought fair." The reiteration came like an entreaty for his hearers to understand.

Tristram saw Lizzie lift and fix a blank stare at her father's face; he heard her murmur of desolate reproach, "Oh, Dad, did 'e think I lied to 'e?" — strange matter for cogitation to him who held handy a thing which might yet prove an uncomfortable fit for a certain head.

At noon an arm of the law arrived, and was conducted by Tristram to the scene of the tragedy. He told as much as he thought good at present for law and order to know; spoke of numbers, quoting Haycraft's words, who was now past making any statement of his own. Under his eyes a barren search was conducted. The suppressor of evidence had ever one hand in his pocket while speaking.

Parting from Lizzie at the day's end, Tristram saw her

calmly prepared to pass the night alone in company with the dead. It brought out doubly the pathetic loneliness which now threatened to be her lot.

He put his hands on hers to say, "Liz, my word still stands, if you will think of it. Say no more about it now."

She shook her head mutely, her mind too dulled by the strain of long hours for speech to be anything but an effort. Letting him go she did not even take his hand, or show signs of emotion till his lips touched her face. At once her eyes brimmed and colour overspread her features; she saw him only through mist as he turned away. That was their good-night.

Tristram went home feeling that she had accepted, though indefinitely, the protection he offered; he was content now to let it take whatever form she wished, though his own wish, his rebel mood being now in the ascendant, was the extreme one.

With his mind thus keyed, he had to face at home the stern demands that greeted his re-appearance.

"Have you been with that woman?" his father enquired. The question embraced his whole week's absence.

"Not in the way you mean," answered his son. "I have seen her; she is in great trouble; her father is dead."

Mr. Gavney's answer expressed a cold satisfaction. "It will get her out of the neighbourhood," was his comment upon the news. It stung the youth to a reply which carried in it threat of destruction to the whole house of Gavney. "I have asked her to marry me," he said.

Words had not succeeded to the consternation and wrath which this statement produced, when the vicar, Mr. Hannam, was announced. Tristram had at last his double quarry in hand; he had also the mood for pitting them against each other without compassion. Argument between the two, himself directing it, would, he knew, hold

no water. The moral of the unhappy hour that followed was that it is peril for a minister of the Gospel to have social standing with a section of his flock; it is damaging to true doctrine. Let the door close on that unseemly spectacle: high voices were behind it for one hour of the clock. "Not another word!" in the raised tones of Mr. Gavney put a raw finish to the conference. At the end of it that unhappy parent deemed it his duty to go upstairs and make his wife ill with a report of the proceedings. He had all the success he anticipated.

"You have taken ten years off your mother's life," he said to his son when they met again.

"If you could add one to mine," retorted Tristram, "I would be thankful!" It was the voice of rebellion hungering to be full-fledged and in possession of its powers. For Mr. Gavney the morrows became dreadful to look forward to.

The rebel had at the moment a troublesome point to solve with his own conscience. Being full of bad blood, it was natural that he should solve it wrong. In his pocket he had headgear belonging to the MacAllister: in his mind Haycraft's reiterated testimony to that brute's fairness in fight. Over and above, he had Lizzie's murmured words to clear a brain darkened by reasonable prejudice. He had also, being a rebel, a profound distrust of the fair dealing of the law; he decided, therefore, to be judge himself in a matter which had come, as it were, under his own jurisdiction.

The pomp of a righted conscience carried him off to beard the lion in his den. He found "the red 'un" exhibiting no undue alarm at his appearance, and no particular deference. A nod and a grunt bade him stand or be seated. MacAllister remained at his desk.

"Yours, I think!" said Tristram, and tossed the incriminating piece across to him.

"Mine it is," said MacAllister, letting it lie.

"Found, where do you suppose?"

"Where I imagine you'd have done well to leave it," answered the bailiff, unmoved.

A shrewd answer! An attitude of bold non-committal seemed to be the fellow's line of defence. Tristram approved it. He said: —

"Mr. MacAllister, only one other living person besides yourself knows a bit of what I know; you needn't fear a word either from her or me. I know now that you were unjustly suspected of a certain wrong; and the only man who could have charged you gave his good word to acquit you before he died."

"If you talk of charges and acquittals it would be fairer to name names," said the other disdainfully.

"I name Haycraft," answered Tristram.

"A rogue who escaped hanging."

"A brave man, and honourable, according to his lights. You owe him a kinder word."

"Footpad and poacher's my word for him."

"As you will," said Tristram. "If you did him or his less wrong than you schemed, you may be glad now that you failed. His death needn't trouble you. Every dog has a right to his day."

MacAllister nodded agreement to that, and wished him good-day. "Dog yourself!" stood implied. "And thank you for nothing," said MacAllister, as the other departed.

A doubt lay in Tristram's mind whether he had cut as fine a figure on the judicial bench as he had desired. It should have warned him.

A few days later, at the inquest, he went into the witness-box with a magnanimous mind. He was flattered to perceive that MacAllister also attended, anxious, no doubt, to hear him fulfil the part he had promised to play.

The bailiff's disdain of his evidence was then rather more on the surface than he had thought. "The fox doesn't trust me!" thought the youth. "He shall!"

With punctilious accuracy he recounted the ramblings of the dying man's brain; in his narrative the red 'un appeared but as one among many, and disappeared again with no special importance attaching to him. A scuffle of poachers in rivalry was the inference that remained on the conclusion of his evidence.

Great was Tristram's astonishment, on quitting the box, to hear MacAllister called to take his place. As a voluntary witness unsummoned by the police, he had his credentials; moreover, he spoke the truth. Oh! shrewd brain under the red head! Tristram had to listen and admire. His suppression of the truth came out. Eyes turned to look at him. Why, by the turn of a lie on his tongue MacAllister could have brought the implication round to him! Hark to the court questioning, and the cool-headed replies.

"Can you account for the deceased attacking you?"

"He had a grudge against me."

The witness was asked to name it.

"It had been put into his head that I had ruined his daughter." Shrewd punishment that, to certain ears; there sat Lizzie, there Tristram; at him eyes set thick and fast, he felt them on him like a swarm of stings. The thought came to succour him, "If I have brought this on her, it gives me the more right to make amends." The rebel in him reared up its head. Meantime question comes again; the witness is ready and waiting for it.

"Was there any truth in that suggestion?"

"A lie!" said MacAllister, and let his eye travel to Tristram.

The court buzzed.

Tristram heard himself recalled. He stood up and took

his punishment; even the verbal truth of his testimony was doubted in the face of new facts. The cap episode damned him utterly. His evidence was censured; he escaped with that. MacAllister's unscrupulous honesty had won the day. His committal for manslaughter thereafter before the magistrate was merely a formal proceeding; the same evening saw him released on his own recognisances; and a week later he was free even from the mild shadow of a hold that the law had kept on him.

Meeting Tristram on a later day the bailiff cocked a sharp eye on him.

"YOU TRIED TO SAVE MY LIFE ONCE, MASTER GAVNEY!" he said, and passed.

Tristram for all his honest hatred of the man could have shaken hands with him for that; the condescension to such a move would have been on MacAllister's side. He was incapable of it. Give him his triumph, it is one honestly earned. With this he passes out of history.

CHAPTER XXXII

LOVE AND WAR

WORD of these things flew abroad. It came to Lady Petwyn, who greeted it, crowing triumphantly over the strokes publicly dealt to the idiot she adored. On his own family it fell with all the bitterness of sharp disgrace. Mr. Gavney beheld scandal pointing at his door so long as Tristram remained in the neighbourhood. Further the tidings went, and now, for the first time, with particulars of the whole scandal, reached Raymond's ears; it found him on the very point of returning for a brief visit to his home. The news struck him a double blow; and with the typical injustice of the male, he was quicker to doubt the woman whose heart had opened its depth to him, than to believe in the treachery of his friend. The honour that exists among thieves is the specially preserved virtue of the predatory sex. Of woman, the unknown quantity, it will believe things that of its own it rejects.

Raymond damned Tristram without prejudice, regarding him merely as an honest sinner like himself. But elsewhere his thoughts ran black as night. Unbelievable! cried his heart as base suspicions took shape; and straightway he believed them all. To set down here all the madness into which a revived jealousy temporarily threw him, were to give too permanent a record of thoughts dishevelled, flying, clouds worried out of all shape by the black teeth of a mounting storm.

Let the reader, if he will, retrace for himself the course of Raymond's inquisition of the past, and construct with him the forgeries of jealousy. For though love may be abused or forgotten, jealousy for the past leaps to life, and from the heart of memories that had once been sweet, tears food it craves for and loathes. At the end woman's honour had flown to the winds: his friend's stood firm. Tristram would have been the last to thank him for the compliment — thanked him surprisingly little for it when it came to the point.

All that Raymond heard of the Tramp's extravagant attitudes, his almost published threat to go to the extremes of a foolish chivalry, convinced him of his friend's honesty. In spite of pique and indignation at the trick circumstance had played him, he conceived, therefore, that he had a duty to perform, a sharp word of sense and instruction to level at his addle-pated comrade's intelligence before it should be too late. To him, as to MacAllister, the fitting of caps had become a duty: for percussion-caps they might well have been named in view of the explosive results which followed. The young man, calling virtue and vice to his aid, wrote in loathing as duty dictated; in further loathing as temper whipped him to comment; and with a last swell of loathing despatched the missive.

Gloom was governing the breakfast hour at the Valley House when the distribution of the post brought the letter into Tristram's hands.

He nodded to Marcia, saying " from Raymond," as he opened it. In another moment she saw his brow go black; and at the end of his perusal a trembling hand make a vindictive crumble of the sheets it held. Hot fire was over his face. Murmuring an excuse, he rose to leave the room. Marcia looked away. In the culprit's absence Mr. Gavney spoke.

"Your brother goes to London early next week," he remarked, giving the news with the tone of an order laid down.

"Does he?" said Marcia, more interrogatively than she meant.

"He goes out of this house," said her father. "If you have influence with him, advise him."

"If Marcia has any influence with him," said Julia, "she is a blessed exception to the rule. Don't, my dear, let it turn your head."

"His, you mean," said the girl, smiling. "Yes, I *will* use my influence with him, papa," she went on, laughing over her parent's chair. "Shall it be done like this?" The display that followed evoked protest.

"It's no over-exertion," she said, setting him on his feet again, "influence never is with me; only be good-tempered to him, papa, and I will see what I can do."

Having, as she would have termed it, shaken her father into a good temper, she bided her time for dealing with the other half of her problem. He was missing for the rest of that day. Outside the village during the forenoon she met Raymond, and finding him eager to be in her company, had much to hear of him fresh from sheep-farming. She admired the superabundant signs of health he displayed. His spirits, too, seemed as of old. Asking for news of Tristram he let the answer go unheeded.

"It's you I want to see more, Marcia," he said. "I've looked forward to it, I can't say how much. You wouldn't believe me if I did."

"Is it advice you've been wanting, then?"

"As an accompaniment, yes! But it was you; I swear you are the jolliest friend a fellow could have! Just to hear you talk puts me in a happy frame of mind. Now you laugh! What have I said foolish?"

"Nothing yet."

"You think I will presently?"

"Not unless you begin to mope. You were doing that in the summer."

"Oh, that's over! Don't I look good? Haven't I swallowed all your advice? Now I come back for more."

"Give me a point to start from, then! I'm brimming with wisdom."

"Why am I leaving England, tell me?"

"Tired of old faces, want fresh ones, I imagine."

"Yes, fresh ones are what I like," he said, looking at hers. "One fresh face would go a long way with me."

"Would it?" she asked, and looking for slight chaff, saw the keen edge of his meaning. Without intending anything she had given him the lead he wanted.

"*Will* it?" he asked. "Don't say I talk nonsense! I'm asking you for advice now."

"Fresh faces don't remain fresh for ever, Ray! Some questions require a look twenty years ahead before they can be answered."

"Look ahead, Marcia, and answer me!"

"Answers from a long distance take a long time in coming, Raymond."

"They may take what time they like, so that they come at last."

"They may bring a shake of the head. How then?"

"I should say, then — you didn't look far enough; look again!"

"I declare, Ray, I think you are sensible!"

"I can swear I think I am in this."

"Do you know what it is you want?"

"You to love me, Marcia!"

"But I only like you now."

"How much?"

"Just as much as is comfortable; not one bit more.

"No chance of it getting *un*comfortable?"

"I think we are both too sensible. No."

"You think I'm not, then?"

"Not what?"

"Uncomfortable."

"Not very."

"I *am!*" Raymond spoke with solemn conviction. The girl's laughter flew out.

"Oh, Ray," she cried, "if you could see your face when you say that!"

"Why?"

"You look so contented."

"Because I believe you like me."

"I've said so!"

"Love me, then, I mean."

"Oh no, I don't! except as I say, comfortably. That's fact, Ray."

"Can't we improve on it, put a piece on day by day?"

Once more Marcia laughed. "Oh, Ray, you are nice about it!" she cried. "You are no trouble at all! I could say 'yes' out of mere gratitude, if I didn't mean no. Dear boy, I've never thought of it! I must be wanted desperately before I can begin to think. We are neither of us at the stage to do that."

Raymond said: "I'd stay in England to serve you, Marcia: make new plans: be a different man."

"No, no," she protested, "I like you as you are."

"But like isn't love, you say? So before you'll love me I must alter."

"Don't begin to be clever, Raymond, or I can't answer you," said Marcia, entangled by the argument.

Raymond replied: "I'll be a fool, Marcia, if you'll only give me the answer I want."

"But I haven't it in me, Ray."

Looking, he found her eyes very cordial and friendly. "Will you ever?" they gave him encouragement to say.

"There's a question that takes time to answer," she told him.

"Oh, take time, if you must!" he conceded, and made generous allowance. "Will you tell me to-morrow?"

"What? will to-morrow have altered you so much, do you think?"

"Perhaps a little if I have that to look forward to; and you a little, Marcia; add the two up, we might make it into much. Enough for you to begin an answer on."

"Begin an answer! Now you are trying to be crafty. How can I begin an answer of which I don't know the end?"

Raymond said with humble seriousness: "You might have the end in your own mind; but you needn't tell it me until you think I deserve it."

Marcia took his hand and swung it laughing. "Oh, Raymond," she cried, "you dear impossible person, what will you be saying next? To-morrow I'm to find like changed into love; and then I am to bottle it up till I think you deserve it! What repentances and changes have you to get through? Aren't the debts all paid and done penance for?"

"One may think so," he answered, "but they have a way of cropping up again and looking as if they were not paid. Some debts never leave quite a clean slate behind them, however much one may rub with one's own fingers to get rid of them. I want another's hand to polish me."

He held Marcia's; there was the old moody strain in his voice that she knew and hoped to have mothered out of him. It brought her back to the old tone of hearty comradeship, covering a tenderness for the concealed malady.

"My hands are always at your service, Ray," she informed him.

"But I want your heart, too," was the youth's discontented cry.

"Warm, you have it!" she replied; "but soft, I don't believe is in me."

"Warm does for me!" he said; "I can leave the soft for babies."

"For babies; it's where I come nearest it," she answered. "I've been hugging a little brown one since I saw you."

"Then I'll be one!" cried the inconsistent youth, taking fire. "Marcia, I want you — I do! I want to be made a man of; when I'm with you I feel I've been far off it. You undo my pride, and make me ashamed of things: things if I had loved you sooner I'd never have done. Looking at life ahead it seems full, with you in it; with you out of it, I don't care where I go to, or what I do. Tell me to stay in England, I'll stay: tell me to go, I'll go, though I shall understand what that means. Let me only have your wish for me to work on, and I'll be a reasonable contented Christian. Keep your answer till I've proved I'm worthy to have given you the trouble to think of me! I'll come back for it and take it, whatever it is, as that of an honest and true woman, the best alive, who would rather hurt than wrong any man, and hurt herself rather than not do right. Marcia, when may I come?"

Her voice thrilled slightly as she lifted breath to reply; his words had touched strangely the weak and the strong places of her character. She said: "Come to-morrow, Raymond, or the day after, or any day; you will be sure of seeing a friend. If I can give you any answer then, I will."

She spoke from a moved, but an untroubled heart,

gave him her two hands, looked him in the face with all the good-will in the world, but for conscience' sake could not say the word she would almost have liked then to let him hear.

"To-morrow!" she said. "No, no, that will be Sunday! the day after will be best." Had her voice sounded less confident and free, Raymond could have discovered more immediate hope in the prospect. She seemed too heart-whole for a lover's eye.

So they parted, from a wooing in which much honest speech and few words of sentiment had been uttered. The raging wooer would have affronted her taste. Raymond, schooled unconsciously by her friendship, was approved. The stride of her free spirit was not diminished because she had listened to the voice of a man searching for his mate.

Marcia had claimed respite of one clear day. She used it honestly for the quiet searching of her heart, prepared to find no more than a benevolent vacuum, unserviceable to the man she would have been honestly glad to satisfy. Other spirits paid less observance to the day appointed for rest.

Raymond had received a peremptory word from Tristram, naming time and place, as though the world and its Sabbath belonged to him. He screwed himself up to get over an unpleasant task. Since his return he had heard the full ins and outs of his friend's madness; much also that he did not credit. That Tristram had by putting off blame from himself to MacAllister hoodwinked the girl's father, and then, with an evil conscience over the catastrophe that ensued, had striven to repair his fault and shield the man he had wronged, was a suggestion he refused to listen to. It surprised him to find his mild father bitter against the youth. "He has done irreparable harm to the parish," was Mr. Hannam's complaint. "I regard him no longer as a fit friend for my son."

His son, nevertheless, kept the appointment snapped at him in a few lines of Tristram's handwriting. The friends met in a quiet corner of the Hill Alwyn covers at the hour when the parish was making outward confession of its sins; other occupants of the Vicarage and Valley House pews were left to speculate on their absence.

Tristram was first on the ground; he disregarded the hand his friend offered him.

"Come, come," said Raymond, "we'll not begin like that! Aren't we friends still?" The offer once more held out was again ignored. Tristram's eyes shot level enmity at eyes which strove to be friendly.

"Oh, very well!" said Raymond, and hardened his face.

Said Tristram, "Which of us is to hear the other first? You've something to say, I suppose?"

"Nothing," answered Raymond; "I came at your call."

"You've been making a queer duty of absence, till now!" retorted the other with a stiff lip.

"And you've been enjoying elbow-room; it seems you haven't been in want of me."

"Not particularly. I've been fighting liars!" said Tristram.

"Using their own weapons a bit?"

"Giving them full play; yes, all I could do while the man who should have met and silenced them was hiding himself comfortably away."

"Name where you accuse!" said Raymond with sudden sharp delivery.

Tristram raised his voice.

"Skulked, I say, put his tail between his legs and ran! Cared nothing what was said, or who accused, so his back was out of it. The man who could be silent, then —

I didn't know him till yesterday, not till yesterday! — I thought he must be so much a brute that he had best be let go, that even by lies it were better to keep the very woman he betrayed from being named along with him! — yes, I looked about to hit on some rank fox of a fellow: thought I'd found him, though I never named him — and got punished for looking too low among the scum of things instead of where I ought, at the man I once called my friend." A trembling white fit of rage went over Tristram as he spoke.

"When you've done being mad, I'll speak," said Raymond.

"I asked you to do that first."

Raymond was no fast thinker; he understood but the half of what he heard.

"Two days ago," he said, "I was told of this for the first time. It was on that I wrote."

Tristram stared; his enmity rallied to the retort. "Let so much be, then! The cause of all this lies in something of a year ago. Do you pretend ignorance of that too?"

The sneer was obvious. "Are you expecting that I shall tell you lies?" asked Raymond, with wrath fast smouldering to a flame.

"As you please!" Tristram had almost said. "That you begin to tell anything is the surprise!" was what he actually did say.

Raymond discerned that Tristram had been through fire; he made allowances, and answered: "It was news to me; of the actual event I knew nothing at all!"

Tristram's brow gathered for storm. "And at once when you know you write insult of the woman you have wronged!"

"I told you a plain truth," said Raymond. "Yes, perhaps I wrote in a temper. The wrong was all round.

If not, where do you come in? Don't speak, you, of insults!"

"I," said Tristram, "have asked her to marry me. Is that insult?"

"No, but it implies something," said the other. "Too much for me!"

"Yes, that I love her, and would give my life to make up for the wrong she has been done! I grant you have the first claim. Will you take it, having been so backward? I see now for her there's one man in the whole world. One — Ray!"

"Facts stand," said Raymond; "you must be mad, or you'd see reason. I wrote to get you out of that mess."

"It's a pity I can't thank you! What you have done is to throw insults where in all this world you have least right! Raymond, if — if you would do that — yes, marry her — I'd call you my friend again!"

"I don't marry ——" Raymond spoke a deliberate word. An astonishing thing happened.

"Right!" he got out through clenched teeth, and spoke no more. Madness must have its way.

Within twenty minutes Tristram was lying on his back with closed eyes. A mere enemy might have pitied him then; his friend had a harder resentment to get through; forgiveness came slow.

"Damn his obstinacy!" muttered Raymond, beholding him thus. "Why couldn't he have taken his beating ten minutes ago? I hate pluck when it's so senseless! It's a mad brute that won't know when it's beaten. He is mad, I think!"

Physical pity for the sight that confronted him moved him at last; he put his hands under the wrecked youth and lifted him, making a support for his head. The feeling of those slack limbs wrung thorough commiseration from

him; a moan came to tell him of a stunned brain, which would not consciously have blabbed so dolorous a note. Composing his burden to what he trusted was comfortable repose, Raymond ran to find water for his victim, feeling himself the most victimised of the two. His hat was fairly water-tight; but to carry it back and not spill what it retained took time.

When he returned Tristram was sitting up with his back to a tree; dead pallor showed obscurely through a countenance whereon livelier hues were bedded out in patches and streaks.

The stricken object sat passively regarding Raymond as he approached.

"Come, you ass, drink this!" was that grudging Samaritan's remark; and the ass indifferently took it and drank.

There was an elevation of the nose, as the thing was done, out of keeping with the sullenness of defeat. Raymond beheld it with no little astonishment. "Tough!" was his grunt of mental admiration. "And a very devil for obstinacy!" To account thus for him with hard words, made in Raymond's mind the beginning of charity. His kindlier mood met with no recognition; that battered visage wore a fine edge of contempt; after one glance the eyes let him alone, turned elsewhere to be rid of him. Raymond felt himself ignored. His attitude, proffering the water that Tristram might again refresh himself and be clean, became servile under the continual slight of his studied inattention.

Feeling he must say something, Raymond strove to be generous. "Here, Tramp, old chap, I say! do you feel better, then?" was his first effort.

Tristram was mute, and began slowly to draw down his sleeves over the arms he had bared for the encounter. Raymond glanced from those to his own more formidable

display, and with some shame of face started to do likewise.

Presently he beheld Tristram knotting his cravat, still with the chin-airs of a dandy. What did the fellow mean? He had taken his whipping well; couldn't he become sensible?

Raymond stood up, feeling the accusation of brute, as the bigger and better man, unfairly thrust at him; he was hungry at heart to be generous, to make all the amends he could. Was there no getting hold of the creature? He stretched out his hand to claim the final courtesy, the prize of the stricken field — his opponent's hand; yearned to have hold of it, and by a clasp say so much that the lips would blunder to speak.

"Give us your fist, Tramp!" he said, reaching down. "We must make this up again somehow. Come!"

Tristram gave him a level look, and away again, and entangled both hands in the sleeves of his coat. Actually he had no strength for hoisting it on.

Raymond's eye became a little hardened.

"You won't shake hands, Tristram?"

"Rather not," he replied in curt tone.

"But you've fought me; you must! It's not friend'y!"

"I didn't suppose fighting was friendly."

"If you fight an equal, he has a right to your hand after it. Come!"

"I'm not your equal," said Tristram.

As he spoke the boy was rising to his feet by the help of the tree; with his coat dangling down one arm he leaned toward the trunk for safety, looking very deadly the while.

Raymond was endeavouring to deal generously with an enemy who seemed bent on driving him from one ungrateful attitude to another. The bad form of the thing cut him. "Sulky cur!" he could have cried. The

sneer that they were not equals made it one worse. "Well, was it my doing?" he cried. "You might behave decently; it was to please you I fought. You would have it."

"Very well, and you've licked me. I'm much obliged to you!"

"God!" cried Raymond, "was there ever anything like this? You take a licking till you can't see, till you can't stand! till you are knocked out of your senses, and lie a mere log. Then, when you're up on your feet, because you can't have the thing over again, you sulk like a cad!"

Tristram's body became strung again with passion. "Do you suppose," he cried, "that as long as I had feet under me I didn't wish I could kill you; or now, if I had any strength left in me, that I wouldn't wish to still? Yes, with my last breath!"

The words struck Raymond like a bolt. Rallying, he said: "That sort of talk is mere wind. Why should you want to kill me?"

"Why? She's Marcia's sister, and the man asks why! It drives one mad! Yes, that's how I think of her: I love her! She is like Marcia: I can't separate them. And so brave I've seen her, — and suffering, — and I couldn't help! And all the time, where were you? Don't think because you've beaten me once that you've done with me! Till I die I'm her friend!"

Raymond said scornfully, giving the word its uglier meaning, "Did she choose you for her protector?"

"No," said Tristram softly, all at once; "she chose you! — a poor thought, wasn't it?"

"That's folly!" struck out Raymond doggedly. "You've turned your brain mad over this; you've no sense to see. I can forgive you your mouthings, though precious little of them can I understand. There, I won't

listen to you again! Give me your hand, and hush all this talk! I'll see you home."

"Ray," said Tristram, "I used to think you the best fellow alive. I couldn't be prouder to know any one than to know you. I thought to be your friend was the biggest piece of luck that ever came my way. Well, that's over now! Now I think you so poor in honour that I would rather never have a word with you again — never, unless you do right to that poor girl whose one wrong-doing was to love you. Oh, if I could find the right word for you now, I'd spit it in your face."

The other crimsoned, though with the thought that none but a madman, or wilfully blind, could use such speech. "You forced me to fight you, thinking that of me?" he asked.

"I — I," Tristram stammered; then turning his confusion to scorn, "I'm not proud of having fought you!" he said.

"Perhaps not, but fight me you did; whatever you thought of me you brought yourself down to my level to do that; you can't get away honourably without paying the price." He paused and went on: "Tramp, I refused to think ill of *you* — any worse, I mean, than of myself, though I was told worse, — oh! had it from those who believed it with a good conscience — my own father for one. I say you must give me your hand; it isn't a mere form. It's — it's — give me just this chance of thinking you aren't quite mad; or well, let it be that it's for the last time; let it mean as little as you like! Tramp, *I* mean it; and you don't know what hard things you've said to me."

The younger man only heaved his chest, looking intently at the other's face of pleading and reproach.

"Suppose, Tramp," Raymond went on, "that I'd been the one who came off worst, that you'd whacked me, perhaps as I deserved: what then?"

A bitter smile curled Tristram's lips. "Maybe then," he said, "I should have killed you."

"I know better," said Ray. "Before I'd asked, you'd have given me your hand."

"My hand?" Tristram turned indifferent contempt on himself, "I needn't be so scrupulous with a thing that has served me so ill. There, if you want it, take it!"

The hand, after so much dispute, lay dead for Raymond to clasp — dead, dead. He held it with more desire than he could name for a returning pressure upon his.

That never came; he let it fall.

"Now go; get out!" said Tristram, bitter to the last.

"I'll see you home," said Raymond. "Oh, that may mean nothing at all. I'd do it for a dog; you are too knocked up to go alone."

"Get out!" reiterated the implacable voice. There was nothing left for Raymond but to go. He went, feeling, what was perhaps the truth, that a most ungenerous measure had been dealt out to him. Once he looked back and saw Tristram leaning his head against the tree; his arms were up; his body strained as though violent sickness had come upon him.

When Raymond reached home, he mounted to his room and looked furtively in the glass. "Oh, damn!" he cried, transfixed by what he saw. Scarcely a trace of the conflict marked his face. He felt himself a very hound. Tristram's best had never got home with any weight behind the long reach of his arm. The very reverse of what he intended, — therein lay Tristram's master-stroke, the moral and the summing up of the whole battle.

Raymond Hannam's self-respect lay, if one may make use of so shadowy a paradox, shattered at a blow. The negative was stronger than any positive Tristram could have devised.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FORTUNE SHOWS A BLACK FACE

NATURE had given to Tristram a comely countenance, making him a presentable and likeable object to his fellow-men. "Your Greek bronze," had been Lady Tetheridge's description of him to the Hill Alwyn dame: a phrase intended to flatter the ears of one who over all the youth's good qualities made great show of proprietary rights. But there are bronzes and bronzes; it was no Phœbus Apollo that his features took after. Faun and Hermes rolled into one give a better vision of his style; or were one to emulate the exactness of a compass indicating that the wind's way lies north-north by west, Faun should be named twice to once for the light-heeled messenger of Zeus.

No sleeping Faun, let it be understood, but one ready for the dance up to the very roots of his hair; a sight of his eyes only would tell you of blood briskly at the tramp. His lips were typical of his nature; they fought, upper with under, met only to part again, and played quickly at moments in keeping with divers senses; when the eye was alert, they breathed ardour and surprise; when the ear, they opened and became a cavity, indicative of sound. Movement was the controlling genius of the whole face; a momentary arrest of thought gave it the pause of a thing aimed, or of a bird suddenly checked in flight. His sister, catching him asleep once, had dis-

covered a different person; bringing her mother to see, they were met by the full open eyes of a light sleeper awakened, one not easy to catch.

For the rest of this chapter, the face one has here tried to make visible has to be conjured away; a very different one takes its place: a temporary affair not needing to be described, but a portent while it lasted, destined as it went the rounds to startle conjecturing minds, give a little pain to a few tender hearts, and mischievous delight to a certain tough one.

Tristram's place at home was empty during the rest of Sunday's meals. Though Mr. Gavney wondered fretfully what fresh piece of indiscipline the day was to bring forth, Marcia's peaceable explanation seemed probable. "Raymond was not at church, either," she said. "It is long since they have met; no doubt they are off together for the day." She wondered what confidences Tristram was receiving from his friend, but soon corrected the fancy, preferring to think of Raymond as one who unburdened seldom to others, and in this case to none.

Late at night, on her way up to bed, she thought of looking into the Tramp's room; at times he had quiet ways of returning. She knocked lightly and entered; the room was dark; Tristram's voice replied to her call, apparently he was already in bed.

Marcia had learned that the best way to news of her brother's performances was not to ask questions. She sat down against his knees and told him her own small doings of the day. She got little from him in reply. He confessed at last to being sleepy; his tone did not make her believe it. Going out she was struck instead with the conviction that he was ill. Over ailments he had an indomitable pride and secrecy, hating to be nursed. To get proof for herself Marcia returned with a light. She turned him over; would look at him, she

insisted; only the sight of his tongue would satisfy her. "I warn you," he said; "you'll drop the candle! I've had an ——"

She almost did when he sat up.

"Tris, you've been fighting!" was her cry.

He nodded doggedly to the correctness of the supposition.

"All I knew how!"

"Oh!" went Marcia in a low breath. The actual enquiry she longed to make died on her tongue; she asked him instead, "Are you hurt much?"

"As much as you see!" he answered shortly, and refusing to have anything done for him, lay down again, by silence inviting her to leave him.

But first she wished to know, was he not ill as well as hurt? "If I don't eat a good breakfast to-morrow," he answered, "you may begin doctoring me." And the promise was hearty enough to give ease to her mind.

Preparing to go, she enquired, "Were you not with Raymond any of the time?"

"Some," he murmured.

She left him on that, and passed to her own room and a sleepless night.

On the morning of the next day the pageant of the woful countenance started on its rounds; its bearer carried a high head, answering only such questions as he chose.

Mr. Gavney, ready with enquiries as to his yesterday's absence, broke off abruptly to exclaim: —

"Good heavens! you can't go to London with a face like that!"

"I can't!" said Tristram, with demure satisfaction. He had not thought of that before, though certain trunks had stood packed for the last three weeks, waiting on his pleasure to move.

His father's request to him to absent himself from the family board till he had recovered the looks of a gentleman, led him to enquire whether those same looks were compatible with trade: — was he to come to Sawditch as usual?

In that direction also he was to consider himself criminally incapacitated, and to take holiday in disgrace. Mr. Gavney refrained from direct investigation into the spectacle before him; but his mind registered a dread that he might yet have to hear of his son as a drunkard, a lover of taverns and low company. For that reason he curtly bade Tristram keep out of his mother's sight.

The youth dutifully avoided her room.

When from a window she saw him first, he did his best to soothe her lamentations, by crying up that he had had a fall. Strictly true. To have said several would have been still nearer the mark; and all on his back, he might have added to make bewilderment perfect.

Marcia coming upon him in the light of day, ran out of his company in strange fashion, as though she too partook of the general disgust.

Recalling their interview the night before, Tristram was at a loss to account for the change, till, coming on her again, he detected tragic lights and stains about eyes which ordinarily made little show of emotion.

Miss Julia Gavney sent unsolicited fomentations to his room with hourly regularity; this was her way of indicating that he was a sight unfit to be abroad, and the place therefore in which he ought to stay.

Indeed Tristram was not anxious to meet the world even of his own intimates; and for some days while his spirits were recovering he surrendered his rides rather than make a gratuitous display of himself before Lady Petwyn under present conditions. Nevertheless, when

summons came for him, pride stood uppermost, and he disdained to shirk the encounter of her remarks.

At the first shock of him her eyebrows went up. "Well, you look handsome, I must say!" was her immediate greeting. Peering sharply to get at the meaning of the damage done him, she detected human agency.

"So that's the moral, is it?" she nodded, assuming that the matter stood explained.

"A moral certainty, you may call it," he answered, "if you mean that I've got a bruised head. Accidents will happen."

"And some take two to bring them about," she grunted, adding: "I know a double event when I see one side of it. You haven't, I suppose, been brow-beating yourself in the witness-box? No! there's another half of you about somewhere. What I want to know is which looks the better one?"

Her play of tongue made it easier for Tristram to be merry over the traces of his punishment. "If it's evidence you are after," said he, "I think I'm the best witness. Oh, yes; the better half's here for you to stare at. You sent word you wanted to see me, and for once I'm worth looking at; that's the advantage of having a thin skin; you'll not find my match anywhere."

"But you've brought me the box where it struck," she retorted, holding him with a shrewd eye.

"I'm sure you flatter me," he answered: "the box lasts after the match that struck on it is done for; here am I, at all events, alive, you see; I do claim to be that!"

"So that's a thing to boast of, is it?" she enquired; "and MacAllister hasn't, at present, got another justifiable homicide on his conscience? I must have a look at him."

"Then you'll be on the wrong scent," said Tristram,

"though you'll find a fox. For his kind I've learned to love him, and wouldn't have him shot for the world."

He told of MacAllister's passing remark at their last meeting, and showed a new respect for him amounting almost to enthusiasm.

"Then, you haven't been fighting him?" questioned the lady, preparing to speculate afresh.

Tristram assured her with inimitable coxcombry that he had let the red rascal off. "I've realised," said he, "that a man can't help the colour of his hair; it has taught me to be charitable."

Lady Petwyn saw that he was talking her off the track. "Then, you mean I'm not to know?" she enquired bluntly.

"Oh, you are welcome to, if you can find out," he answered. "But really, if you meet a friend sober in the morning with the marks of dissipation on him, you don't immediately ask him what ditch he lay in the night before, do you?"

"It's the ditches of your sobriety I'm anxious to find out," she retorted. "They are the exception. You have spasms of common-sense which make you dangerous, and hold you from the wisdom which awaits the fool who persists in his folly. As for your dissipations, I have but to sniff the wind, and open my ears, and there they are!"

"Sniff the wind and open your ears, by all means; and then call this an attack of common-sense, if you don't find the solution." He indicated his bruised countenance.

"I declare," cried the lady, with a quaint air of conviction, "I believe you've been fighting your own father!"

Tristram's laughter pealed; henceforth he had her at arm's length. Up and down she might beat the bush;

when she had him most cornered, ripples broke over his face, and he exploded once more. "There, there," he protested, "don't spoil a good explanation!" and would have it that it was so.

"I tell you what!" he declared, "my father's a real bruiser; he beats me to make me become a Londoner; and now I'm so bruised I can't go!"

Lady Petwyn heard then, for the first time, how closely London was threatening him. She halted him abruptly to say, "Do you want money?" He could have had a hundred pounds on the spot from her just then, if he would have consented to play her game. She had by no means relinquished her schemes to capture him, and saw her easiest way to them in a breach between him and those having natural authority over him.

Instead of securing him, however, the calculating dame beheld one of those spasms of common-sense, of which she had accused him, and had to lay by her offer as a bait for an hour when he should be less wise. So it was that at a later day signs of a questionable affluence were to sink alarm into the paternal breast, making it appear that, however Tristram's feet might be directed for him, he had the faculty for shaping the course into a road for ruin.

But the shrewdest questions on the face of events were not to Tristram; in silence they rose; and were answered. Strange to Marcia, at first, and then less strange as thought went over the worn ground once more, was the fact that no hour of the first day that offered had brought Raymond to gather the possible sweetness of her second thoughts. An early hour of the day following saw her setting forth defiant on an interdicted road, and at the end of it holding out motherly arms for a much clothed dormouse to be put in them. She nursed it with unquestioning tenderness, and thereafter went back to her daily round of occupations with a serene brow.

Raymond's face, when at last they met, showed an anxious consciousness, a covert enquiry. Her bright welcome of him seemed to give relief to a mind ill at ease. But when, rushing to his point forthwith, he asked, "Have you an answer for me now, Marcia?" she became unlike herself, and fenced the question.

"Am I to believe that you want what you come so late for?" she enquired.

His excuse was a little too subtle to approve itself to her ears. He feared, he told her, to come on uncertainty, and had schooled himself to wait; she had asked for time; he had given her all he could.

"It was not like you," she answered, "but I suppose I must say thank you; though it's a day lost."

Her eyes were grave; "a day lost" had not the meaning a smile could have given to the phrase. In doubt as to what it might foreshadow, he was in haste to plead.

"I know this of you," he said. "If you were for me yesterday, you are not against me to-day."

"Dear Ray," said the girl, and gave him her hands, "I am always for you, never against you; be sure of that!"

Her words might have seemed to hold encouragement for him, but her tone implied a difference. Though her eyes were bending kind looks upon him, they seemed to withhold the promise he sought to find in them.

A fear caused him to say suddenly, "If you had heard anything against me, you would tell me, Marcia?"

"I would," she answered. "I have heard nothing, Ray."

So quiet an answer, without surprise, given in response to a question that should surely have startled protest, failed to reassure him.

Her hands were still lying in his: "Dear friend," she

murmured in a low breath, and turned bright eyes to him, "believe indeed that I care for you!" Her full aim seemed to be to convince him that her good-will to him was unchangeable. But for a young man striving to win first place in a woman's regards, so general a cordiality was beside the point. He intimated as much at last, saying:

"I want to know whether you mean ever to care for me more than you do now?"

For a moment she startled his hopes surprisingly by replying, "I mean to; yes! Let it begin to-day. You must do your part, Ray. It shan't be my fault if my liking for you stands still."

Her words quickened his thoughts. A little fleet footing, a breath of the outer world, — they wanted that to bring them together; such conditions had been their happiest auspices hitherto.

"Will you come out?" he said. "Yes, for a run! never mind what the weather is. I have a thousand things I want to say; and sitting-still ties my tongue. A walk, Marcia; perhaps a last one before I leave England, — if I go." His looks were keen on her when he said that. "You won't refuse; say you'll come?"

Marcia seemed to be consulting the sky; she looked long through the window before she turned to give him his answer. "I'll come, Raymond," she said finally; and in a couple of minutes she was ready.

Outside they found themselves under a grey headlong sky, in a world filled with a thin flight of leaves and the cawing of rooks. Gusty autumn had taken an early hold of the year, unsettling the woods even before October came. Slanting over their shaken tops went scuds of rain; here and there down the valley ran a furrow of light; to the west a watery weather-gleam filmed over the ridge of Randogger.

As they set out together her eyes were friendly, meeting his; they swung along side by side like well-contented comrades; any one who met them then might have had pleasant thoughts at sight of so well matched a pair. Tristram saw them go: Marcia in the company of the friend he had cast off. Was he bound in honour to be silent if Raymond dared so to presume?

Marcia chose the first turn of the way, not lending an eye to the clouds. "I'm quite prepared to get showered on!" she said, and handed to Raymond a small bundle for carrying. "I have an errand I want to do on the way," she explained, "it won't take a minute; if you like you can drop me." She spoke on, of common-place subjects, giving no sign of the strange hunger she was beginning to feel for the heart she intended that day to let go; nor did anything in her face tell Raymond that, before many hours were over, he would have to abandon hope of her.

On the evening of that same day, the Tramp ran over to see Lizzie. In a few days she would be giving up her home to become part-tenant of a cottage further along Randogger Edge. Having gone through so much fire, she was not one to hide her face, even to secure a better standing elsewhere. The employment found for her at Hill Alwyn was, moreover, a reason for her staying in the neighbourhood. So the morals of Little Alwyn were still to be disturbed by her unscrupulous presence; and the clerical edict was taking effect without securing its end.

His few days of seclusion had made of Tristram a more presentable object, and he thought to escape Lizzie's scrutiny if he went near dusk to see if she needed his help. In any case she should not be left to feel friendless and deserted when the trial of change was hard upon her.

Amid all the upset of a dismantled home, Lizzie was pleased to see him, and grateful for his coming. She eyed him, saying, "I heard you'd been hurt," but asked nothing. She added, "Miss Marcia's been here to-day," and saw him start and change colour.

"Alone?" he asked, unable to restrain the question.

It was Lizzie's turn then to be suddenly sensitive; the blood rushed to her face as she affirmed that it was alone her visitor had come. Her thought was of a day when she had seen Marcia not alone; more recent sight had confirmed the memory. Two had approached through the upper wood; only one had descended to her door. So their thoughts flew abreast in the dark; but Tristram, with the home interdict suddenly in mind, misunderstood her face.

"Oh, Lizzie!" he cried, distressed; "could you think I meant anything so brutal? No: she had some one with her when she started; that was all."

Lizzie's eyes were on him then, under deep ambushes of shade. Confusion was upon them both; over silence as a barrier each looked to see what the other knew or thought.

"No, no," half whispered the girl in husky tones, "she came alone; she stayed a long time. She's like you, Mr. Tristram; so good to me she is, and makes as if it was nothing."

Tristram's thoughts mazed over Marcia's coming: over the increasing consciousness of the look Lizzie directed at him. Saying nothing, they went on reading each other's eyes; therein a hurried mute conference was taking place. His said: "I know, and you know. I am your friend, give me the right to speak!" Hers said: "If you know, what good to speak? It would only be more pain for us both."

At that, "Oh, Liz!" cried the youth, with the longing to speak too strong to be repressed.

But the girl to whom friendship had been so far kinder than love, dreaded now to let friendship speak.

"Don't, don't!" she cried, and hung back from him, fearing what next she might hear.

"Nothing, Liz; I'll say nothing then!" he cried; "only let me help you more than ever now!" He spoke of money, thinking she might be in some present embarrassment over the expenses of her move. He felt sure she needed money, he said. "If no one else will help you, let me!"

She cried out suddenly as in pain, "Oh, Mr. Tristram, then was it you put that into his head? You couldn't have done crueller. See what you've forced me to do!"

"What?" he interrogated, bewildered.

"It's gone back to him!" she cried, and spoke as though some unclean thing had touched her and been shaken off. "Did he think, after all, I would take money from him so? Money, and not a word!"

Tristram began to comprehend.

"Oh, yes; you've been kind," she went on, "I know; I love 'e for it all! But this, this; oh, it's like a fresh shame come to me!"

"Liz," cried the youth, confounded and all abashed. "I just know, yes, I do just guess what you mean! but don't think it was my doing! I never breathed a thought of such a thing:,so poor, so miserable a thing as that!"

"But 'twas your doing!" she said, and fixed her eyes at his face. "Yes, you did it, for you, you——" her gaze let the thing be understood before the words could come out — "fought him," she whispered. "You see I know. You've hurt his pride: — and me: as though I had ever complained to 'e! You got this from poor

father; his notion was not to let things alone. And now it's you, Mr. Tristram! and that do hurt: that you should have made him think to go and do so!"

The force of her reproach ended in a wavering gentleness; she could not hold out against the pain her words gave him. With a sudden impulse she seized his hand. "You must forgive me for what I've been saying," she sighed. "I know what you did was all for me. But there's only one thing I wish now: — that he shan't be ever troubled by me, or let me come between him and his happiness. What I have I'm proud of; while that lives I can thank him, for all the pain!"

For a strange end to her words she drew down his head and pressed her lips to his forehead. He heard her weeping then.

Tristram went, feeling himself indeed an unprofitable meddler in the cause he had wished to serve. For all his pains he had received — what? Forgiveness for a foolish fault generously done. Thus he went home in a tractable mood, more humble than he had been for many days; even Mr. Gavney, had he tackled him then, might have found him tractable.

Late in the dark end of the evening, as he strolled along the shadowy fruit-walks, a hand was slipped under his arm. Marcia's voice spoke.

"Trampy," said she, "your twin wants to talk to you."

He welcomed the hand to his side with a gentle pressure. "Yes," he answered, "yes. I've been hearing of my twin to-day; and nothing but best things, Marcia."

"And I of you," she answered in graver speech.

"Anything new?"

"Not to me: it was hardly said for me to understand; I only guessed because I already knew. Dear Trampy, I'm telling you this because I want you to know that I

never thought more of you than I do now, when I've something to ask you, that you mayn't like."

"But ask it!"

"It's to do something."

"For whom?"

"For me."

"Then it's almost done; if it's possible."

"No, no, it's not begun!"

They had stopped, and stood now face to face, the sister holding her brother's hands.

"But you can say it, Marcia! or are you afraid of me?"

"Only that you won't do it!" she sighed.

"It must be a truly dreadful thing, then," said he, trying to laugh.

"It is! Oh, for you, it is, I know!"

He waited patiently to be told. At last, out of silence she spoke.

"Give it a trial: for two years."

"You mean?"

"I mean just for two years, Trampy; what is that in a whole life?"

Her voice sounded like weeping.

"Why have *you* asked me this, you of all people?" he cried, perplexed.

"Because," she said, "to-day, I want to know that there is one heart in all the world that loves me. One that I can be of use to; just one."

"Wherever you go you do good," said her brother, with fond belief.

She doubted it, having in her brain a memory of angry eyes, and of the reproaches cast by wounded pride. Had she thrown, or been thrown? she hardly knew.

"To-night, I wish to do good," she said. They stood under a window showing a soft light through its blinds.

Marcia pointed: "May I go up and tell her you will go?" She waited, and getting no answer said, "A word from you, Tris, can make us a happy house."

"Because I go!" said the boy bitterly.

"My best happiness will wait till you come back, Trampy," she murmured. "But I'll make no more plans: they bring too much danger with them. Will you give me two years of hope? To-night, I feel that it's all been wrung out of me."

"Has anything happened?" he asked.

"Nothing, nothing!" she said in dull tones. "Give me something that shall happen!"

Holding hands their hearts exchanged pained meaning through the clasp of flesh. Tristram nodded to her out of deep thought; he seemed to have hold of something then, and was moved to grant what she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I'll go. Dear Marcia."

He stooped his head. She lifted hers. "So that's said and settled," she affirmed, and pressed a quiet kiss to his face.

"You love me, my twin?" she said.

"No one better in the world, I think," he declared. "Whom else would I have said yes to?"

That satisfied her heart.

As they went into the house: "By the way, I have a bit of news for you," she said. "In a month Raymond leaves England. It is to be the Colonies for him; he will do well there."

Her voice was cool; even to his ear no tremor was in it.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SHOWS THAT THERE IS SOMETHING IN A NAME

IN the brief writing she held, signed with Raymond's name, Lizzie's eyes looked on a mystery to which the words themselves gave no key. She read in them recognition of herself and of her child; yet could not recognise him, her lover of old days; behind the known writing the hand seemed strange. Here, if words told anything true, was a full acknowledgment of the past, of her good faith to him, of his own faithlessness to her; he offered their child a name; he begged her pardon, humbly and fully accepting blame; yet he was not a lover when he wrote these things.

What exactly he was she had yet to learn, and extend to him the help which only a heart proud of its possessions and humble of its claims could give. She was to be his succour when others had brought him into discredit with his own conscience, when self-respect was bitterly in quest of a hand to mend its wounds. But at present she saw in his letter only a strange response to her recent rejection of his aid, and marvelling why his heart had melted to her at all, failed all the more to understand why it remained so cold.

Indeed his case was a strange one, and one altogether beyond his own wits to fathom. Self-love had filled him with suspicions; these had now been overthrown. Self-love again had driven him to take refuge from one

woman's sweetness in another's; and Marcia had seemed to him then a rose without thorns. Yet under the benign graciousness of her aspect there had been discipline for his blood: she had given him a vision of love that was neither animal nor sentimental; and having so raised a reverent understanding in him of what union with a woman might be, she had let him go almost with a toss of the hand. So at the end of his strange steeple-chase with conscience an impenetrable barrier rose.

Marcia gave him a riddle hard to read; the words she delivered were straightforward enough and plain, but coming from her what did they mean? When as a last cast in the attempt to save his pride, he made a final claim for her love, her bidding to him was that he should seek another mate. "I will love you best," she said, "the day I see you give up thought of me." In anger then he made charges he did not believe, accusing her of things foreign to her nature; till, in the midst of his battery of words, she abruptly quitted his side to fulfil the errand she had spoken of.

Then for the first time he realised where he stood. Her absence became revelation to him. With her parting word she had bidden him go, yet for an hour he waited, though the sky broke over him in torrents. He understood at last that until he chose to come for her where he could not, his dismissal had indeed been given to him there; she, sheltering meanwhile in the cottage whose thin blue smoke-curled up from the woody hollow below him, had cast him that test.

He went home wise, bent upon quitting Little Alwyn the same day. Tristram's madness had come to have a meaning at last.

Of that wisdom, late in coming, others knew nothing. It kept him close company, bringing him at length to entertain a different guest with an aspect that had grown

strange. Understanding of those features of truth which he had misread, revealed his self-respect grievously overthrown; so with a hard purpose of self-conquest, he was brought at last to sit down and write to the woman he had wronged.

Yet it was not at the dictate of love that the letter was dispatched. Lizzie receiving it could see that much. None the less did she hold sacred the wish that it expressed. As the father of her child, obedience on such a point was due to him. Whatever he had made her endure, in one thing they had a common property; the feeling of that had been constantly with her from the first day of its coming, standing between her and shame. Now that she had his wish, implying the claim so long ignored, pride, if not joy, carried her to look on the cause. She buried her face in soft flesh, murmuring a name; and cried suddenly in answer to the child's coodling notes, "You will be proud of your Mammy, now, *now!*"

Tristram, coming to say good-bye, found her with strange eyes. She would not hear that he was off in another day. "Wait," she said, took up her child in her arms, and passed the letter into his hands. With head up and wide eyes she caught at her breath, and laughed as he read, perilously on the brink of tears; and when she saw his eye on the last words, said, "Mr. Tristram, you will wait for that, won't you? I wouldn't have any other god-father for my boy."

It seemed to Tristram as if autumn's leaves were leaping back on to the trees and the woods rushing on a return to spring; almost he had his hands on his friend again — almost. Lizzie had not to hear him say the words, "I will come!" they were there on his face. She was glad to see him glad.

Why Lizzie herself remained at all despondent then,

he failed to see; his eye, with a lighter and more hopeful glance, had missed what stared her in the face: the fact that the man who sought her pardon and recognised her claim, still held back from restoring either love or pardon to her. Her task was only to satisfy his pride; justice he would give her, generosity had not awakened in him yet; she was too humble to think that she could ever regain her place in his heart. Mother-love told her he might one day be proud of his boy; not ever of her, she feared.

Under Randogger Edge, on the borders of that side of the Hill Alwyn estate, stood the district church of Long Alwyn, which shared with more distant Hiddenden the ministrations of a resident curate. Once a month, by aid sent over from the mother parish, it received the compliment of a morning service with communion to follow; but the fixed hour for the district to parade in worship was upon Sunday afternoons, when the church was accustomed to receive within its walls a full rural congregation with a sprinkling of the local fashion.

The latter element was chiefly represented by two long rows of men and maid servants from the great House up at Hill Alwyn, an establishment too eaten up with greed and indolence to bestir itself for the earlier and more orthodox hour of eleven at the parish church, to which also it was half a mile further to go. There and here Lady Petwyn's pew stood empty; and her evil example had spread laxness among those over whom she ruled. Nevertheless, at Long Alwyn, the hour being convenient, a fair force mustered in livery and plumes, and sat to be admired by rustic eyes.

On the particular Sunday to which we are now brought, it chanced that the curate was away upon his holidays, and Long Alwyn received the rare compliment of a visit

from the vicar. Beholding his approach, Mrs. Gummet, the clerk's wife, became a little flustered. The charge of the service had fallen upon her hands, and she had important matter to communicate to whoever came to take duty.

Curtseying to Mr. Hannam in the porch, she told first how her husband was laid up with a bad knee, and hoped she stood excused, she a woman, for her assumption of his official duties.

The vicar heard her apologies and was passing on; another curtsey and an eye charged with meanings and a moral caused him to pause.

"There's a christening, sir," said Mrs. Gummet, and gasped for indication that more was to be said on the subject if she should be allowed.

"Very well," said Mr. Hannam. Still she spoke: —

"The font *is* ready, sir" (meaning that in spite of high reasons her submission to his possible ruling had been prepared). "But do you allow, sir, that it should be? is what I ask! A Sunday of all days!" She threw up her eyes, at a loss to express her scandalised sense of the matter; and, to the interrogation her words drew, "It's that girl, sir!" she exclaimed; and thought then to have spoken all.

She was bidden to give the name, and heaved a breath.

"Lizzie Haycraft, sir!" By his assenting look she gathered that the vicar considered the thing to be in order. "And my husband," she went on protestingly, "when he hears of it last night — for she come down and give him the notice of it beforehand — she did that — he do say, that for the like of her to choose a Sunday; why, a Sunday! he said, sir, — it seemed to him it was an ungodly thing to do, and a scandal!"

Mrs. Gummet had been among the foremost in the campaign against Lizzie. "She's brazen, sir, that's what she

is," she declared finally. "But she 'aven't come yet; so shame may 'ave struck her at last! What I'm to do, sir, if she does, is what I want to be told."

"If she comes," said Mr. Hannam, mindful that a priest's duties were towards sinners as well as saints, "you mustn't send her back. It's a case in which there has been too much delay already."

"And so my husband told her when she come!" said Mrs. Gummet, eager to let the vicar have her agreement on that point. "And says he to her, 'Are you going to be churched now, Miss?' (It made me laugh, sir, that did!) 'You can't have that on a Sunday,' says he. 'You go and have it done quiet one day in the week!' but no, she wouldn't."

"It would have been better," said Mr. Hannam, but would hear no more from Mrs. Gummet just then. "I must baptise the child if she brings it!" On that point there could be no discussion.

Mrs. Gummet folded her hands over the conclusion of the matter, as who should say, "I have done my duty; it only remains for the Powers to do Theirs." Emphatically she disapproved of *that* child being received into that church on a Sunday afternoon, as though it had come respectably into life like other children. Where were morals if such things were allowed to be? she wished to know.

The vicar hastened to prepare himself for his duties. To the credit of his flock be it spoken, such cases as Lizzie's were rare; and anything like her peculiar attitude was unheard of. He had done his best to get the girl out of the parish, but eviction had failed; she was still there; it gave him a hard struggle to be charitable.

He strove to conduct the public worship of his parishioners with a detached mind; but the pricks of the world entered in and disturbed him. He grew painfully con-

scious that the christening, to which he was bound, would leave his congregation profoundly unedified. Presently scandal would be fluttering in that place where no such thing should enter, and the miserable sinners of a whole parish would be fixing their eyes upon one, wondering to see her appear in a church of all unsuitable places for trespass.

After the second Lesson he turned westward, and stepped towards the corner cleared of pews, and dignified by the name of the Baptistery. He had proceeded halfway down the aisle, when he perceived Lizzie rising from a back seat below the gallery, and saw Mrs. Gummet gazing round-eyed over the lid of the font.

Then it became apparent to him that scandal had indeed entered the church in spread-eagle fashion; both sides of it were there, and neither had he now the power to expel. In company with that daughter of mischief stood another of the same breed, no other than Tristram Gavney, wearing a most ungodly look of satisfaction and encouragement to the sinner beside him; he seemed to be wantonly using the church, in order to clinch the rumour which had connected their names.

The malevolence of the deed fetched a buffet at the defenceless man; his priestly duty compelled him to go on. The colour of the thing grew lurid to his mind. What, *what* would Mr. Gavney say when he heard of it? And what could he, friend and neighbour, but surpliced in office, do to lessen the blow? He had to walk into the trap open-eyed.

In the westering congregation heads were bobbing to and fro. Grooms from Hill Alwyn were upon the grin. New light for many showed amazingly on a situation of some mystery; and burning gossip, suddenly confirmed, stifled in the enforced silence of the sacred edifice. Everybody who knew anything, knew all now; could swear that

all along they had known. But at these supreme moments the longing is to be able to tell the world so; and to whisper it to no more than a single pew-full, was a poor, thin way of uttering the "I told you so!" of clamorous scandal-mongers.

Mr. Hannam guessed fearfully that he was about to lend his aid to an act of outrageous rebellion: from private insubordination Tristram was preparing to claim recognition as a published criminal. And why, when there had always been that obstinate refusal to commit himself to a clear confession? He should be brought to it now. At least the vicar hoped to arm himself with that. He would make Tristram speak: if there on permissible grounds, he should be brought to utter the truth.

Overhead the organ wheezed flourishes of a processional character, to accompany the footsteps of office. Mr. Hannam, approaching his objective, beckoned Tristram towards him, first by a signalling eyebrow, then by a more imperative motion of the hand.

So summoned, Tristram showed a courteous willingness to advance. The musical tunes up aloft covered a short whispered conference.

"Why are you here?" enquired the vicar, breathing his anger low.

"Church!" said Tristram, like a good boy puzzled at reproof.

"Here, at the font?" The presence of Lizzie and her child were indicated. "Are you the father?"

"The *god*-father," Tristram corrected, and drew away. He had a wrathful pleasure in the situation, the *contre-temps* that had brought Mr. Hannam of all people there. Beside him Lizzie stood, having a pained heart, genuinely distressed.

The organ stopped; they stood like confronting parties on a field of war; Mrs. Gummet and the vicar formed the one side, Tristram and Lizzie the other.

The baptismal service began; the prayers were read; the god-parents stood and were catechised as to their creed; Tristram gave manful answers for himself and the small drowsy recruit at his elbow; with a ring here and there on the words he strove to smite the clerical conscience with the protesting activity of his faith. His part ended, Lizzie's began. Oh, beautiful soul! suddenly she made his angry spite seem small indeed. Bidden to "name this child!" she stepped forward, and under her breath passed the words. So low, Tristram, though he knew them, could not catch their sound. And as she relinquished her burden, by some kind of help the sleeper was roused, and lifted a hearty outcry to the roof. Up and up went the crescendo of the shamefully disturbed suckling. His cries served their charitable purpose, cloaking the words the vicar had to pronounce.

The ears of the congregation were deluged in the sound of those healthy lungs. Thus does bitter ironic life ever mix situations of laughter and tears.

When Mr. Hannam handed back his burden properly washed and bedewed, a staggered look was upon his face.

What had he heard? He had expected rebellion to sign itself in Tristram's name; had listened for that. No; he heard instead his own son's: "Raymond . . . Hannam . . ." and low as the words were breathed, had not been able to doubt their sound. Dark eyes from a dark, grave face looked up into his. The statement lay as much there as in the utterance itself. Could such a thing be true!

Part true, may be. He looked at Tristram, and was ready to stake his conviction that a major truth lay suppressed. Oh, shameful! his own son; yes, he could admit that it was possible; but behind — behind?

He beheld a conspiracy of vengeance; thus she struck

him for seeking to purge the neighbourhood of her presence, for ousting her from her home! Let that wait! He resigned himself to the formal completion of the office. Heavily over the heads of a restless congregation the concluding portion of the afternoon service dragged.

Out rushed the gossipers to the porch; they sat upon tombstones and rails, and hung about the gate till the chief actors should pass by. The scene was rehearsed, canvassed, amended, put into fresh form and back again; many asked for the name — who had it? it had not been heard. Scandal rattled on a cracked nut empty of its kernel, and was happy, thinking it possessed all. Wiseacres harped exultantly on the indecorous sight they had just witnessed. Lady Petwyn, too, when she heard of that scene, smote herself with a curse for having ceased from church-going.

In the vestry stood Lizzie to have her child registered. Before her sat the vicar in office, with suspended pen.

"Is that," he asked, "your own child I have just christened, or another's?"

"Mine," murmured Lizzie, with her eyes down on its face.

"You are not married yet?"

"No, sir."

"Are you going to be?"

Lizzie's colour mounted high: she did not answer; seeming to ignore his presence, she began rearranging the shawl in which her child had its nest.

"Your silence is an answer," said the vicar. "What I have to ask is this. Are you aware that the name you have given to your child is my own son's name?"

"Yes, sir, your son's name," she answered in quiet tones.

"Will you tell me what right you conceive you have to call him by that name?"

"It was his wish."

"I am to believe that?"

"If you ask him, sir, I think he will tell you so. He wrote to me; I've not seen him; he said the name was to be his."

There was dead silence for a while.

"And do you hold yourself justified in naming your child after my son, in spite of any other circumstances that may be unknown to him?"

Lizzie was too simple to see his drift.

"I shouldn't have done it, sir, without he'd asked," she conceded, that she might be acquitted of presumption in the matter.

"Then I ask you only one thing more: if you had not named it after my son, had you the name of another for it?"

Lizzie was blind still: she believed all now to have been declared. With her heart full of gratitude for the friend who had stood by her in need, "I did wish," she said, "and Mr. Tristram wished; — he asked me to name it after him; but that was before, before ——" she paused. "I heard from Mr. Raymond after that."

The vicar shut his mouth, and filled in the Register. "I knew it!" he said in his heart, believing that cross-examination had brought the truth to his ear. Yet it was a poor triumph he had gained; and the pride of his name had been brought low. He and his stood at least indebted to the silence of this girl who had been sinned against and sinned. How far shame had carried her he dared no longer to ask. She was armed with Raymond's written word.

Oh, poor fathers of sons! oh, the depravity of young men!

CHAPTER XXXV

LETTERS AND A VISIT

LADY PETWYN'S comments on the affair followed the Tramp up to town. "I hear you have adopted the infant," she wrote, "not *at* the altar, but next door to it — in sanctuary, where decency couldn't have you by the leg, and haul you out again. A good notion, the result of prayer, I imagine. Sorry I was away that week, and on the day you came to scrape your dust on my door-step. So parents are still made to be obeyed, are they — that old-fashioned notion! — and I am to behold you no more.

"How did the respectable Billings look (the only truly respectable one I can boast of) when he opened the door to you the day after? He was there among the rest of the twelve eye-witnesses from the servants' hall. Whose gabble dinning up from below shall I re-embellish for you, to hear how a silly, clever exploit sounds when that class gets hold of it, applying its own ideals thereto? Seventeen years have I paid for that pew, which Bones used only to owe for, and this is the first return it has ever made me. Cheap at the price, I call it now, for I never thought to adore virtue like this. I perceive your flagrant possession of it has made the neighbourhood too hot to hold you; so what I lose in companionship, I gain in the elevation of my ideal. London's your place. I'll see you there before long."

"Harriet Jane Petwyn," she signed herself at the end of a string of the half-malicious but harmless tittle-tattle with which she showed her contempt for the world in general, and for her neighbours in particular. "Your vicar goes about the land with his head on one side, looking hung up and sad," was one of her phrases for a sight that rather contented her than otherwise; and for a postscript, "Your Beale Isond gives me up at the end of the month; I suppose you have found washing for her to do in town. But she doesn't tell me her plans."

A fortnight later he got another letter from the lady, recording a further progression of events.

"Your Parthian shaft has been found sticking," she wrote. "The neighbourhood quivers like a jelly when your name is mentioned. Billings, it seems, had the extravagant curiosity last week to pay the fee for a search of the Register; and the guileless curate let him. In the flick of the eye the thing stood to view. All rumour became *boulversé* at the news; with an ugly crick in its tail as regards you, my friend. Lurid is what you have become now. Only I, understanding at last the particular frolic your virtue has been indulging in, can weed out the criminal element; others don't. Your act reads treasonable, and nothing less! Don't imagine, because I acquit you of the major offence, that I approve your way of conducting the show. Nature does not require cuckoos to hatch their own eggs; and your male parent-bird is let off in this country if he fulfils his pecuniary obligations. I doubt too whether a change of weapons was permissible, after you had received your knock-out (for I perceive now the particular cause in which your visage became clouded). But the ways of virtue are beyond me."

Tristram was finding those ways hard, now that they led to regular hours at an office in the city each day, where the roar of the money-markets of the world reached

his ears: to him a vaporous ado about nothing, when he had not old Gilpinger's enthusiasm to jog him to its romantic possibilities.

Deadlier ordeal still was the proper boarding-house, wherein he had to bury his leisure under the weight of unimpeachably respectable surroundings. After a fortnight of it he begged for relief, complaining of the tedious society of old maids and city young men. It was refused him; his tender age forbade the notion of solitary lodgings to those who guided his destiny. Lady Petwyn hearing his groans gave him introductions, which served somewhat to raise his spirits. People who kept horses and rode, even in no more open space than the now withered Row, breathed an air of country and freedom over his sense of exile.

Among acquaintances, old and new, he warmed to two: Lady Tetheridge and her nephew, Jack Talbot, a happy, silly youth, sent down a freshman from Oxford with the task of cooling his heels for a twelvemonth. The kind matron set him to show her adorable ploughboy a few of the wise and foolish things of town: and, in the companion thus thrown on his hands, the young scapegrace had presently found a kind ear to chatter into concerning his college delinquencies, and a senior who was in all worldly things his junior — a delightful friend for the boyish vanity of a town youth.

They met less often than they would have liked owing to the disarrangement of their hours. The sight of towels flicking by the morning Serpentine had drawn the Tramp to join himself to the celebrated parade of the buffs which takes place there all the year round; and the practice drove him to his bed early, when the chief activities of Master Jack's day were about to begin. Nevertheless, the hint of gay things to be seen for the asking became attractive when his sparkish friend hung the weight of a wheedling

hand upon his arm. A very innocent likeable mad-cap Tristram found him.

Jack cantered daily in the Park, and enquired wonderingly why he never saw Tristram there. "You ride?" he asked; but as though the question were as superfluous as "You wash?" addressed to an Englishman of healthy instincts. "Not here," said Tristram, to whom, after the claims for his stolid and stodgy board were satisfied, small margin remained. The enquiry from a friend fevered him to consider the thing a necessity. By docking himself of wine and a few other luxuries, and by a mid-day diet of something like buns, he compassed the hiring of a mount, and on most days took a jog when few but vigorous appetite hunters were abroad. Jack Talbot met him now and then with protestations against the unreasonableness of the hour. "But you are so jolly!" he groaned, and heaved off sleepy habits for the sake of such fresh comradeship.

Marcia wrote how she, too, was riding. She described the sensations of the exercise to her brother as, "like being tossed up to heaven in a blanket, with angels combing one's hair all the time, and a feeling that one can't fall off." Her letters told of a new friend, one Harry Ferring; it seemed that the two rode together most days. Harry was a girl, god-daughter and ward to Lady Petwyn, who had bidden Marcia over, and put into her hands this boon comrade of her own age and sex if she would be so good as to approve. Marcia's approval of her own sex was the rarest thing under the sun; yet it was evident that at first sight she had unstiffened her back-bone, and yielded to the charm of this new acquaintance. Her letters hardly showed what it was. "She can't walk as far as I can, but she's not afraid of cows, and she rides ever so much better," was almost the only critical note Marcia gave of the newcomer's personal qualities.

Tristram's own rides, which in London had to be paid for, had brought his exchequer low; he was on the point of relinquishing them when, like the gift of a fairy godmother, a lavish cheque fell on him. "I gather they have been screwing you down," wrote the bountiful dame, "as if good ever came of that! Do with this as you like; no questions will be asked." He was forbidden on utter pains and penalties to return it. "You may squander it in charity if you like."

The gift was accepted. His charity began at home. In the midst of his imprisonment it secured him a flutter of freedom. The boarding-house had been protesting against his hours — his early hours. At one end of the day he gave trouble, at the other he was unsociable; his habits cast a slight on an establishment which ordered itself on a clock-like system of punctuality. A week later he was in rooms of his own, and had sent word of the accomplished fact to his home. The purse-strings might tie themselves into knots now; and did for a time, till his father discovered that by some stealthy means the terrible youth had become independent.

Thus from a distance, with her shrewd eye on his doings, informed therein by Lady Tetheridge, who told tales of the youth's social success, Lady Petwyn kept her hold on Tristram. She knew when to step in and throw her toils to secure him. Town should polish him to her purposes; two years would not be too much; in her own good time she would reward him well; but as her subject he was only to hear the declaration of her favour, to win his allegiance without revealing the actual bait ahead. Captive of her bow and spear, was the game on which she had set her tyrannical old heart.

She had jeered Tristram through his mad fit as a mere laughing-stock; now that his back was turned she was beginning to conceive a grim respect for the concentrated

devilry of the seizure. She discovered it to have been no empty flourish of an addle-pate. Results had been coming to light. Within two months of his departure one came which shocked the rest into insignificance.

He received an enigmatic missive, shot with baleful gleams of admiration for the long reach of his arm. "I confess myself," wrote the dame, "a convert to the Jesuit doctrine. Such a knock-out as you have delivered now, justifies all the means. The poor vicar has taken a holiday on the strength of it; his duty has to be done for him — I wonder you, with your meddlesomeness, didn't come down and offer for the vacancy. The news is a week old here; and to you, of course, it comes stale."

Tristram had not a notion what she meant: home-tidings had told him nothing of any new stir. He puzzled over her letter all day. Returning to his rooms in the evening he was told a lady was waiting to see him. "Mrs. Hannam" caught his ear; the servant sent the name after him as he was ascending the stair. The word pitched on a bewildered mind.

Opening the door he thought to meet some elderly kinswoman of Raymond's, and anticipated small comfort from such an interview. It took him an appreciable moment to recognise the dear visage, so little expected, which rose up to greet him as he advanced.

"Liz!" Was it she indeed? Her voice confirmed him.

"Tristram," she cried, half shy in dropping at last the prefix to his name.

He had her in his arms; like brother and sister they embraced.

"They told me?" he said; — "they told me?" He paused, and she answered: —

"I was married to him last week." She said it without triumph, without emotion; merely as one making a grave statement of fact.

"Oh, Liz," cried her friend, clasping hands on hers. "So it has come to that? I'm glad, very glad; yes, much more than glad!" He was jubilant and could not let her go.

"Dear friend, I knew you would be glad!" she answered. "Thankful is what I feel."

"Is he the old Raymond again?" cried Tristram, eager to have his friend again before his mind's eye. "Is it his old kind self?"

"No one could be kinder than he's been," she said, and said it without joy. "He's goodness itself!"

"And you love him, Liz?" asked Tristram, merely to have her "yes" clear away the suspicion of a cloud.

"I do, oh, I do!"

"And he loves you, Liz, you may be sure of that." She was silent. Her womanhood was paying its penalty now: not a thing to be named to any, even the dearest friend. Her debt to Raymond she was restoring him patiently, day by day. All life ahead of her, if need be, should be that.

"He is coming," she said; "he wishes so much to see you. This is our last day in England. We go to Southampton to-night."

"And the babe?"

Lizzie took up the heavy sleeper in her arms.

"He's always asleep," laughed Tristram. His fingers fell over hers to touch the baby flesh.

"Miss Marcia ——" began she.

"Marcia," corrected Tristram; "yes?"

"She used to call him her dormouse because he slept so."

Tristram smiled into the face he was seeing for the last time; then from the mother's to the child's, and said: —

"Liz, do you remember? the first time I ever had my hand on yours, you'd a dormouse in it."

"Asleep," she said. "I remember."

"And you opened and let me stroke it."

"Yes."

"And we've never not been friends after that. Aren't quite little things strange?"

"They are the best things of all," she said.

He stooped and peeped. "This one is growing quite big; yet he'll never remember me."

"Oh, he must; I shall always talk of you to him. I want you to give me something that'll show you to him when he grows?"

Tristram promised. "Marcia shall send it you," said he. "I haven't one myself."

"And you'll give her my love? I saw her before I came away, but didn't dare say good-bye. I couldn't; not then."

"I'll say it for you. She'll understand."

"Yes; she'll understand; nobody else so well. You'll say I thank her too."

They were realising what a parting they were come to. It became best at last not to speak of that. They sat together, with long silences folding their hearts to the safe keeping of time, till Raymond came.

Tristram heard the wheels that brought him, and went out. The two friends met below.

Hardly a word was said; it bears no telling here. No sound could utter the overflowing wish these two had to put away the gap of friendship from their memories and re-fasten the old bonds. The boyish impulse of his early hero-worship returned to Tristram as they joined hands; quite simply for one moment he pressed his heart on his friend's, and felt the comfort of its beat. The old joy was in him again.

"Here you are, Ray!" said he.

"Yes, old Tramp, I'm here!" answered the deep voice

of his friend, very low. All that needed was said then. So they went up to the room where Lizzie awaited them.

That night Tristram felt rich in grief; in nothing else. Out of his life had gone two of the hearts he loved. In a new mood of violent regret, it seemed to him that his rash and unkind remedies had most of all aided the fate which bore them away.

CHAPTER XXXVI

ANTAEUS IN TOWN

MAINLY by aid of Lady Petwyn's conversational and epistolary powers we get our earlier glimpses of Tristram's life in town. Ill-luck in certain betting transactions at Epsom and elsewhere during the year had driven her to the economy of country residence for a longer time than was her custom. Letters from Lady Tetheridge at last whipped her up to town to behold her youth in his new element. Accounts of the way his modest effrontery had been capturing hearts taught her there might be a danger of capture to his own heart in turn, a contingency to be avoided if her own plans were to rule the future. To subdue certain stingy qualms of conscience, she quarrelled with Tomlin, her country doctor, declared that the treatment of a specialist was the only thing that could save from the results of his mismanagement, and came up to get a near view of her escaped lunatic.

Mr. Gavney, lulled to acceptance of his son's change of abode by favourable reports from the Heads in office, received his second shock from her mischievous pen.

Lady Petwyn's intention to make the youth plunge and cut lively figures before men's eyes gave a premature flourish and adornment to her sentences.

"Your son," she wrote, after a ride in the Park, "supports the family credit, now he is here, in a style others

more to the manner born may well envy. I met him riding the best horse in the Row, where my doctor bids me amble for an appetite somewhat before the fashionable hour; or, rather, I avoided meeting him, in order to follow him round and watch people staring to know what kind of a lord or foreign prince he might be. Undoubtedly he is a success at this end of town; whether he gets his work done in the other quarter is a question beyond me. He seems to have recommended himself to all the introductions I gave him; certainly he has taken to town life very fast, considering how he used to babble of green fields."

As regards Tristram's presence among the morning riders, her exaggerations only skirted a little short of the truth. His form, not instinct as yet with the moderation of town equestrianism, did cause a few to turn and look smilingly at the handsome youth; and his love of having a good beast under him had taken him to a stable where the taste could be satisfied. There his knack of getting himself liked made him an unconscious subject of favouritism, and brought him, on days when mounts were not greatly in request, steeds far above the figure he paid for them.

"Circus bounding!" was Lady Petwyn's jeer at the easy hands-off attitude she had herself partly trained him to. "Riding in the face of Providence and a top-hat!" her attack on the appearance he presented. Tristram's dress had been a compromise on his way up to town: he caught from her a hint which friendly Jack Talbot had been too shy to give, secured a dressing-room at the stables where he was known, and thereafter looked less like "the country cousin let loose," which was another of her names for him. Half-an-hour after his appearance in the Row saw him fixed down to his city desk for the day, and for a time at least exemplary diligence was reported of him.

His lady went regularly to the Park to get her rub with him; it was a favourite place for showing him off to her circle.

She hailed a friend's face in a large, lovely Amazon, Mrs. Paisley Cashel by name, a faithful follower of hounds, and one whom Lady Petwyn had, on past occasions, sheltered from matrimonial tyranny.

"Seen my cross-country rider?" she enquired, pointing him out with a flourish of contemptuous pride. "I've been hoping to find you up in town if the bondage of weeds was not holding you; fact is, I want you. Yes; that's my invention; you've heard me tell of him; forget whether you've ever seen him before?"

"Oh, the ploughboy?" A pair of admiring fine eyes tracked him. "Yes, I recognise him! I've been up a week."

"Long enough, then. If you'd seen him once, you would," replied my lady; "he's that sort — always either standing on his head or falling on his feet — one can't miss him."

"Yes, and I've seen him do it," cried the fair one with laughter.

"Which?"

"The last chiefly; it was smartly done." She spoke of a run-away incident of a few days back: a young girl clinging and about to fall from a horse bolting, and the groom left pounding behind. Tristram on a dive at the beast's head, wrenched out of the saddle, yet landing on his feet firm; and the whole run pulled to a standstill in time for the quakey girl to slip unharmed to the ground. There had been audible applause of the exploit from those standing by.

"Like a circus!" grunted his proud lady. "So that's what his bandaged wrist comes from? The creature's so conceited he tells one nothing!"

She dropped an instruction to her companion, and on the first opportunity beckoned Tristram up to them.

"Content yourself for a while to ride decently," she told him, and brought him to make his bow to the fair face that smiled for his acquaintance.

"Your riding school was out in the Far West?" was the pretended compliment with which she greeted him; "and now you are here to set us the fashion of the Pampas?"

"No," said Tristram, "I'm here to be got into fashion myself; but it's so early. Till the crowd comes, mayn't one ride as one taught oneself?"

"How was that?"

"I used to ride horses bare-backed when I was smaller — unbroken ones."

"Mine," put in Lady Petwyn.

"Then Lady Petwyn broke me in to the use of the saddle."

"And here," said that lady, "you will kindly also break yourself in to the use of the reins. I never saw such a sight in a London park as this slapping and tickling of a horse to steer him."

"This one has been under me before," said the boy, "and when they get to understand one it's nice to play with them."

"It's the form of the thing you're to consider!" was the dame's correction.

"Talk of form; look at that!" said Tristram, laughing and pointing ahead.

"Poor old Lord Keldy," said Mrs. Paisley Cashel, "riding to get the edge of an appetite."

"A forlorn hope," commented Lady Petwyn, "for a man whose interior is said to resemble a gothic ruin."

"Providence," said Tristram, "seems to have set reins to his appetite; and before him the meal to assuage it.

Looks as though he were picking the bones of a particularly tough chicken."

Mrs. Cashel smiled at his prompt picture of the old lord, sawing away at his steed, elbows out and shoulders heaved.

Lady Petwyn's remark was, "Now you know how absurd *you* look, only in the other direction. Don't appear to be so brazenly healthy; give us a chance to take a little of it for granted! I've announced you, and am responsible for the figure you cut here, so be a trifle more reticent."

"And to think," sighed Tristram, as a comment on such instruction, "that there are downs only twelve miles away, if one had only time to get there!"

At the end of the ladies' mile his trainer released him; the hour summoned him. "Come, pony-boy!" they heard him say as they parted, and saw him soon a trampling speck along the distance.

"He's beautiful; quite!" said Mrs. Cashel, with a humorous nod of recognition to his trainer.

"Do me the favour, then," said the other, "to let him fall in love with you!"

"Absurd! I'm twice his age."

"Quite so, and I want him in safe keeping. He's ready to fall in love with anything matronly that lends him an eyelash of encouragement; and as I've my own particular plans for him I wish to have him preserved."

The younger lady sighed rebellious submission. "You call me 'safe' to pique me into doing it!" she said. "I'm in love with him already! — were I ten years younger! —— Well, if I catch him I don't promise I'll let him go!"

"Oh, *I'll* let him go!" said Lady Petwyn, with a grim persuasion of her powers. "You can keep him till I want him, that's all I ask of you."

"Then I've only to be a stalking horse?" wailed the lady comically.

"A decoy duck, if you like the name better."

"It's the thing, not the name, that shunts me to my coffin. I wouldn't do it for any one but you; and even for you I don't know why!"

Lady Petwyn made a frank statement. "The girl's still a shade — not too young — she's a little the elder, but not enough; there's the difficulty; I daren't let her show. I want something from thirty up to forty till he gets the curl to his moustache. Town will give it him before a year's over."

She softened, and leaned a secret look into her friend's face. "You can be mute, Janet?"

"I think you've proved me," said the other.

"Very well. You used to be fond of Hill Alwyn?"

"I spent safe days there."

Lady Petwyn pointed in Tristram's track. "Now," said she, "you have seen its future: one half of it."

CHAPTER XXXVII

TRISTRAM AND HIS TRAINER

THE curl did not come to Tristram's moustache, to use Lady Petwyn's phrase, quite so soon as that managing dame had expected. The callowness of youth showed in his perverse preference for conversation to looks: charm of the tongue and a fair knowledge of life recommended a woman to his liking more than beauty or a smooth skin. "Talk to me!" was his sociable demand; and the passport to his friendship was outlook and insight.

Mrs. Paisley Cashel secured his liking, yet with a doubt whether he knew her to be beautiful; many little arts and feminine tricks, obediently practised by the decoy duck in fulfilment of her *rôle*, seemed lost on him. "You are in danger, dear youth, if you play that game," was her first thought, "women grow piqued by it; have a care!" After a while she came, on the contrary, to believe that he was safe; and practising no more, studied him with very friendly regards. "I like that!" she said to herself, smiling to see him go unconscious through certain ordeals which the huntress in woman, not born of Artemis, put on him.

"Your hot head has the secret of cool blood," she informed her old friend.

"The little wretch is chaste!" said Lady Petwyn. "I don't need to be told that."

These were still early days.

"He is charming," wrote Lady Tetheridge, reviving with Tristram's mother the correspondence of their girlhood, "but, oh, so shocking!" A remark which conveyed quite a different meaning from that which she intended.

The youth's frankness, for which after her rural training of him his lady delighted to set traps before ears least able to stand the assault, was the main charge against him. To put out of countenance those whose social prudery she despised (and she kept many of them in her circle) was a delight to the old dame; she found her perfect material in one whose singular faculty for hairbreadth escapes of unconscious agility, and gaucheries done with a modest self-possession that in itself disarmed, could make a whole table audibly gasp, and the next moment leave half of it laughing.

She kept a lavish house; and at Tristram's bank a balance, whose origin he forgot to look into, for his business-head was assumed like a cap in office, never coming west of Temple Bar. Jack Talbot's habits of friendship also helped him to forget the exact standing of his credit. The accent of independence grew in the news of him that reached home. He had taken a social leap, and found entertainment enough in contemplating this strange modish world, where men and women moved in graceful conventional restraint, athletes in the art of ease: it was a new pleasure to the susceptible country-bred youth to find himself popular among men, and an intimate of women with nice eyes, friendly to his young enthusiasms.

A lady of wits, who wrote books, heard of the creature, and asked for a sight of him. She came and dined, sitting near to a brown youth who sparkled indiscretions and blushed boldly, not out of shyness, but from the mounting of a lively blood under the whip of the fierce old dame's sarcasms and retorts.

She sighted the game early enough, and admired the young man's grace when he was tripped.

He had rubbed shoulders with female clerks in the city, poor things, bloodless with close living and long hours; the employment of women, therefore, was upon him in sharp access as a problem to be solved.

Lady Petwyn supposed it had to be done before he left London.

"Pooh!" she said at his clamour for equal wages to the weaker sex. "Your virtuous woman, making her own living, is a drug upon the market."

Tristram's retort, "So is your unvirtuous — only look late enough!" was a fine fish drawn up to the lady's bait.

To that his hostess replied, "So, like Miss Pry, who complained of the naughty things found in Johnson, you've been looking them out?" and sent him down again. She was always giving him leads; and he, too natural to perceive the game, supplied her in most cases with views which a few months' experience had done little to amend as yet. "I wish you hadn't such a naked eye," she told him, not wishing it in the least; "at any rate, you might condescend to clothe it before company!" She was doing her best all the time to prevent his seeing that all the world was not to be talked to on the lines in which she had trained him.

This friendly world in which he found himself helped him perhaps to fancy that he was happy in the life it led him; he was at all events amused. Lady Petwyn carried back word of him to his home; and it was one well calculated to rouse alarm. The simple fact was that Tristram had not the income for the life he was leading. Where, then, did it come from? Mr. Gavney feared some awful day of reckoning must be ahead, and wrote imploring his son to keep out of debt.

Tristram treated his father's enquiries lightly, saying that he found rooms cheaper than the boarding-house, and what he saved in one direction was able to fling out in another. He believed he had a balance at the bank, and thanked for the remittances that had preserved it. But he wrote to one who knew rather too well that the allowance he received was not handsome. Mr. Gavney gathered that his son's confidence was withdrawn from him; the withdrawal was indeed quite mutual.

Too late now, the paternal pocket, highly susceptible to the danger of being bled at this precise epoch in affairs, smote its owner on the hip for having thus precipitated the mercurial youth to the spot where instinct and opportunity could most riotously combine in causing it to disgorge. It was satisfactory at least to learn that Tristram was still regular in his attendance on duty, though his hour of arrival had become eleven instead of ten.

Lady Petwyn did her best to stimulate Mr. Gavney's fears; flinging out wild views of the youth caught up by the giddy whirl of fashion, she gave the figure of one buoyantly financed; and with designing craft set his nerves shuddering by congratulating him on the handsome provision he had made for his son's introduction to Life. Her stress on the word made it as if spelled with a capital that had been better away, and threw less daylight than gaslight on the meaning it covered. To set the apron-strings fluttering for a renewed hold of the emancipated youth who had so long strained in their leash, was very agreeable to her mind. In the end he was to follow her leading, not theirs; and if she could not have him cutting all the capers she wished, to report as cutting them was the only thing left to her.

Before leaving she had taken means to have him introduced beyond her own rather middle-aged set, to the

manly, clubbable youth of town, calculating on them to turn to a series of dissolving views his provincial notions of all that blood, breeding, and the word honour decreed.

For this purpose she handed him over to one, Captain Rasselles, a skilled Adonis of forty, to be looked after, pushed here, pulled there, but for the most part be let alone, save for the observation of a friendly eye. Tristram found him an attractive enough sort of fellow, combining a sportive manliness with the subtle refinement of town.

"Show him Life," said the lady, instructing him confidentially beforehand; "within reason, I mean, of course." Consideration had taught her that for her purpose ingenuous youth must be set to school; much thought it amused her, it took too long to be rid of its indiscretions, and her limbs warned her at times of the fast approach of age. Warfare had been her life; she wished now for peace as the solace of her decline, and to hear the echoes of Hill Alwyn filled with a blend of the only two romances her life contained. "Mind," she added, "I don't want the bloom taken out of his cheeks. Let him be healthy, but do put into his head a little of the something that is lacking. He wants congruity, and an understanding that to be a gentleman is not necessarily to be a Joseph. How he escapes the Puritan sniffle and the wide bib I don't know; unless because he has jumped back clear into the Middle Ages. He comes up here with a past, I can assure you; there's not a sound windmill left in his native tilting-ground. Teach him also to talk to unmarried women, young ones; he becomes dumb before them. At present when he chatters he's like a jack-in-the-box in the confessional. That's the peculiarity of the male species; its tongue only becomes decently discreet when its life is discreetly indecent. I leave him with you, because I

detect in you the perfect medium between virtue and vice."

Captain Rasselles bowed his acknowledgements, and when the lady was gone, drew Tristram to his schooling with a genial hand.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A CHANGE OF ADDRESS

SPRING blew into the gateless city, and in a single breath taught Tristram to know the captive he had become. One of those great heavings of Nature's heart had taken place, lifting, like a beneficent Pandora, the lid off the season's delay, to reveal what simmerings lay below; and at once a sweet steaming fragrance filled all the air, and the silent rush on summer had begun.

To Tristram it was like the migrant's call. An almost physical longing to run for some field out of sight of roofs, and roll himself in the resurrecting grass, fetched him from office; a spiritual nausea for figures and the calculations of commerce seized on his brain.

His claim to a day's freedom was grudgingly accorded by the authorities; he ranged out with an eye to any beckoning ridge of trees, till sweet stretches of Kentish country faced him in their fresh green.

The larches which Doris had taught him to look out for at this season were already wearing their little beads of blood, and bristling in tiny spirts of living green; and every over-head elm into which he gazed was white with the unsheathing of its first growth. Where his hand rested on them long enough the moist rinds of the young saplings seemed to heave at the push of an intelligence below. He, too, shared in the general wisdom, and while daylight lasted turned his back upon town.

He supped late at a wayside inn, after roundabout

goings, and at twenty direct miles from town turned to walk back under a dim sky of stars.

The steady elation of the road was in his blood; that grey serpent winding through a dusky land was the counsellor who of all had failed him least, when the distempers of life pressed hard. Over his senses cool night air was pouring its balm; he was the Tramp, feeling once more the almost forgotten power of his limbs under him. He might be stiff on the morrow; he had not reached his limits as yet. Twenty miles of wisdom were between him and that submissive folly in which, if he were to stick to the letter of his word, two years of his life were yet to waste. Sugared folly — for he admitted that there was some sweetness where he had expected nothing but bitterness to be — but folly: his mind now saw that clearly. He wondered on what point of honour he was to consider himself held. The only one to whom he had given his word would release him from it; he knew that he had merely to ask. It had been a bargain of consent; his own decision would set him free.

Said Wisdom, "Here is the spring and the bloom beginning, and life is not to be lived twice; have courage to be humble and say, 'It is a mistake, I am wasting, I must be free.'" But to answer that came Folly, crying sweets, denying the waste, "You are learning life: men and women, like a book gaily run through the hand, are showing you the world as it is made. You make friends; you are courted; they like you; it is not flattery that you hear. If for all this you pay a price, do you not receive good value?" Wisdom said, "But these people and these sights, is it among these that you plan to spend your days? Does your scheme of life lie here or there? Are you not, in touching new friends, losing touch with old? And is it 'for a time' worth anything to do what does not bring you to your goal?" "But," Folly ob-

jected, "what other goal lies in view? Does any circumstance offer, that spells a fuller freedom to the soul?" Wisdom said, "Every man possessing his four limbs and a head has at least these to try before saying, 'I am without power to be myself.'" Thus, or thus about, the colloquy of his brain shaped, as he tramped the way leading back to town. His blood rhymed to the speech of one; by the other it was merely tickled. When he fetched a breath of the night, it was one only that he heard.

The conference was interrupted. Along the firm track of the high road he became aware of an obscurity ahead of him. A waggon stacked high with baskets under a tarpaulin hood, stationary and askew, waited where no sign of habitation was to be seen. One of its wheels had sunk into the grass-edged drain-course which divided the footpath from the road. Passing round to the horses by the flicker of a lantern, Tristram perceived the driver's seat to be empty, and a dark body, lying partly under the shafts, partly against the foundered wheel. He took down the light and examined closer. The cause of the accident was fairly clear; a sleepy head, a gradual drag on the left rein, a sudden tilt into the ditch, and there was a poor fellow fit only to be carted to hospital.

Tristram got the man up against the bank, and searched for the flask he guessed the likeliest companion of a night-waggoner on his road. In a while he had wrought a beginning of consciousness into the hulk of flesh that sprawled there.

"I bean't drunk," drawled the fellow, feeling that hands had hold upon him.

"No, my friend, but I found you in a ditch; so you'd the less excuse for getting there," replied Tristram. "Here, keep that arm still, it's there you've done yourself the damage."

"Damage be damned!" said the man, unaware as yet how things stood with him. "'Oo be you?"

"At this moment, I'm your doctor. If I give you a hand, d'you think you can stand upright?"

"Yer think I'm drunk!" answered the man, with some ill-will; to prove the falseness of the supposition, he hauled himself up by the aid of an arm, and straightway collapsed again.

"Seems to me I be!" was his honest conclusion of the matter on thus finding himself down: more must have gone on in his world than he was aware of. Struggling to recall whence came this lapse from sobriety, and at what wayside tavern, — the memory that he was supposed to have a waggon under his charge hammered at his consciousness. "Where be the cairt?" he enquired, not sighting it beyond the beams of the lamp that hung over him.

"It's here," said Tristram. "I have to get you into it."

"It's got to be up at Covent Garden before foive," declared the fellow, without any concern as to his own condition for getting it there.

Tristram gave his word that it should be done. "That's reasonably easy; the difficulty is where to put you!" He looked up at the dumpy round baskets piled one on the top of another; until the cart was emptied no lying was to be found amongst those; nor was the perch in front the place for a man bruised and disabled. Tristram's practical sense took him round to the tail-board; he found it more lightly laden than the body of the waggon, and straightway began hauling.

He discovered presently that he was under an overseer whose word he might not disregard. Called on to explain his doings, he heard that those unloadings were not to be left on the road; place must be found for them;

either all went or all stayed together, man and load. An honourable thirty years' record of the road had to be looked to. That a man should slumber at his post and get pitched out on to his head was an act of God; but to go back to his employer with market-baskets not accounted for, was outside the honest carter's reckoning. "Be danged to 'e, you do as I tell 'e!" quoth the fellow, "or you let it be!" The Tramp spent a good half-hour hauling and re-arranging to suit the unreasonable dictates of a man who sat dizzy and helpless against the hedge, fit only to be loaded on, and freighted to the nearest hospital.

With difficulty he was finally got up. Tristram found sacking and horse-cloths to put under him, and left him in all the comfort that circumstances made possible. He received no thanks for any of these services; but the enquiry "Be you a waggoner?" addressed to him before he went round to the horses was a better reward, and helped to buckle his heart to the work which lay ahead. He took his seat up in front, and started the beasts on their long foot-pace jog toward London-town. It was after midnight then.

Before an hour was over the searching chills of the spring night had struck his blood; he got down again, and walking alongside came presently through Chislehurst, feeling its dim bank of woods upon his right, and seeing for the first time ahead of him the hectic flush, which marked the whereabouts under heaven of the great gaoler-city, charged with the fate of its four million human souls.

Some ironic amusement stirred the Tramp's mind. Here was he, one of thousands under the same quiet canopy of stars, carting the sleeping beast its food. To this, then, after all, tended the life of the tilled acres over which plain Hodge toiled with horny hands. In modern

England natural man lived but on sufferance, or so long as he subserved the great maw that drained the ever less adequate resources of its soil. Yes, in his own country, Town had become the heart of life; thence did little Great Britain reach out hands over the whole world, most just and mighty and grasping of all the breeders of men. Let him not maudle to be quit of her, unless, like Raymond, he were ready for a bold break with his age, and across the seas to bow himself to the simpler ambitions of the furrow and the fold.

Thus the Tramp to himself, driving his slow market-cart up to town. The man at his back dozed; Tristram's occasional call to know how he fared ceased to extract a growling response. Three hours had registered their flight, and the heavy pace of the team at last brought weariness to his feet; forced thus to plod, he found monotony becoming a test to his spirits, as the signs of town grew round him. He passed through straggled miles of villadom, looking cosy amid clustered evergreens in the dull light, and presently was threading shallow streets of artisan dwellings, newly built, where men were already rising for the distant scenes of their toil. From right and left, wheels were beginning to converge upon his way, most of them laden like his own; past him at double pace a great milk-cart rattled and clanged. Cows, then, must be milked at the dead of night: for it was night still; yet here around him were men up, with hours of toil already counted in to their day's work. A caller ran down the street routing slumberers from their rest; knockers were beaten, and windows tapped with the end of a long pole. 'Twas a postman without bags, bringing regularly the time of night when weary men must give up their beds. Homing cats knew the hour, and at the sound of him, as at the coming of the cat's-meat-man, ran shadowlike across the open to squat at doors which

would presently unfasten and admit them to warmth and food.

The air had become very chill, and not a wink of dawn was due for another hour, as he drew his horses into Deptford and viewed the brown squalor of its littered and deserted streets under the shabby gaslight on either side the way. Somewhere about here was a hospital he knew; a policeman directed him, eyeing him doubtfully when he spoke of his mate laid up behind with a broken arm.

Tristram took him round to have a look at the fellow, stolidly asleep in spite of a bruised head and the shaking of the road; he envied such stout nerves, or even the dull vegetable-like strain of tissue through which pain was a mere floating discomfort with no power to obtrude when leisure was found for sleep.

Under a large archway, where a light swung, gate-porters came to help the carter down. His head still waggled with obstinate drowsiness, and he was reluctant to let his waggon go. The Tramp bade him be easy, promising that before five, Covent Garden should have its delivery in strict tale, according to the way-bill passed on to him.

"Count the baskets!" was the final injunction he received as he saw the patient carried through the hospital doors; he gave his word to return and report on duty done. Before noon, waggon and all should be there.

The Old Kent Road had not, at that date, roused the lyric ardour of the music-halls; and its two miles of slovenly shop-fronts and uncleaned gutters were without the associated charm of coster ebullience to give it soul. Not till the Tramp neared Waterloo Bridge did any beauty of aspect in city or atmosphere begin to reward him for his unbedded and chilly condition. The yielding of night to dawn had been proceeding under a slow

thickening of the firmament, film upon film, till behind them the stars shrank rayless and resigned. Now in the cold, shivering east a whiteness began to tell, revealing like a dark sounding-board overhead, one spreading canopy of cloud, low and brown, smirched with the dross of the city's upcast breath. Its fringed edges were but waiting for the wind's fall to drop rain and send a uniform greyness over the tremulously mounting light, whose quickening motion seemed, each moment, to prelude the flushing consciousness of day.

Gaslights disappeared from point to point along vistas of streets, leaving them nakedly aware of the colder heaven opening on them from above; the effect was as the change of a painter's touch from canvas to fresco; tawny shadows yielded to grey. The foot-falls of a few pedestrians singled themselves far along each street. Traffic grew and became faster in pace. News-carts whipped by. Tristram's waggon formed one of a slow-moving line skirting the curb; a dozen similar could be seen at intervals along the road leading to the bridge.

Steely light, as he crossed, shot up from the water, between black barges swinging slowly in the pull of the tide. And now a shrewd wind blew strong across the wide river-way, and in the heavens overhead began rolling aside the threatening surfaces of cloud. Lucent spaces of pale gold opened like windows under the grey, and like slow bars of music, light flooded and grew strong.

Across the Strand, up Wellington Street, and into Russell Street, Tristram piloted his charge, and stood wedged by the incoming stream. It took him a quarter of an hour to work round to his place of delivery.

The name on his waggon-board was like the carcass to the eagles; porters pounced and began carrying off their prey. They ran close, one behind the other in strings

of eight or ten, brawny fellows in jerseys and vests, with foul, merry mouths, swinging at a smart pace under their head-balanced loads. A foreman coming up for the invoice, at first took Tristram to be joking when he claimed the waggon to be his. When he got his receipt he found that it would be hours before he could take up his returned empties; it seemed likely that Covent Garden would engage his energies for the whole day. He was told where he might stand his waggon and give the horses their feed. Looking within he cried, "Hullo, but you've not cleared!" Two low square boxes lay still on the floor of the waggon.

"Nothing to do with us," said the man, who had given him his discharge for the broccoli, parsnips, spring spinach, and kale, which had formed the bulk of his load. What remained now were flowers.

"Yonder's where they go!" He pointed across the yard. Tristram ploughed his way into a seething mass, where, among floral deliveries still going on, flower-sellers were already purchasing for the streets. Baskets knocked his shins, and bruised his back and sides; he stumbled wearily about from stall to stall, and shot enquiries to right and left for any one accustomed to receive of Mr. James Coggerton, of Orpingley, Kent. None answered him. He drew out at last in despair.

Having seen to his horses and stationed them as directed in line with other empty vans, there seemed nothing left but to trust to chance and a time when the market was less occupied, for discovering where his last delivery was due. The sight of a coffee-stall, with bread in huge slices and smoking urns, told him he was famished as well as cold.

Here also there was a throng bustling to be served; he had to wait his turn. Ahead of him a woman with a jetty bonnet over one eye worked hustling to be first.

When furious altercation rose, he distinguished the voice that matched the bonnet, "I am, am I?" came truculent challenge, met by a squeal of rage. "Yer will, will yer?" told in another moment of unfeminine warfare begun. Across the corner of the stall one lunged, and mugs danced and rattled. Resolute peace-makers held between: the disputants could do no more than screech and scratch arms. The one imprisoned termagant beat herself against pacifying barriers, like a butter-pat in a churn; the other, panting to the assault from without, declared her grievance to the crowd: it was great: could ears hear her and not be moved?

"She called me a giddy old whelk!" Out flourished a hat-pin. "I'll whelk her! only let me get at her!" she yelled, and made a renewed dab for her quarry. Down over both eyes flapped the untethered bonnet.

These were the miserable night-scum of the streets, soured at the barren coming of dawn. Honest labour laughed and looked on, contented merely to hold them apart.

"'Ark to her! she's got a voice like a crab!" cried the ingenious inventor of the epithet that had roused wrath. A comely wench, basket-laden, laughed at the aptness of the phrase; for it was a queer voice that the old whelk possessed, and indeed very like a crab's. The injured jade flew at her. Laugh, would she? The poor pretty one showed genuine panic; in another moment hat and feather might be a ruin to the eye. She threw out protesting arms: "Oh, my 'at and 'airpins!" was her cry. Tristram, being nearest, intervened. "Come, missis!" said he.

"Who are yer *touching?*" cried the woman, as she struggled in his embrace. Her accent was on the touch; the outrage on her person was great. The girl had scuttered to a safe distance: Tristram relaxed his hold.

"Who are yer touching?" the fierce-tongued jade went on, finding herself at liberty again. "Touch *me*, will yer? d'yer calls yerself a respectable man? What d'yer think *I* am, then? — A respectable grandmother!" she informed the world, and she spurned lesser recognition; an ancestress at forty, she could make her boast.

"All right, granny!" answered the youth. "You want your breakfast, that's what's the matter with you. Come along and you shall have it!"

The woman found herself dealing with one of the quality; she beheld treating possibilities in his eye, and became a lamb.

Friendliness settled on the crowd; the time of day was medicinal to all. Tristram's heart grew happy as the mug of hot brown fluid went up to his lips. At his elbow came the young girl he had succoured from the old whelk's rage. She smiled shyly on him, but was ready enough to be treated when pressed. Flowers, she told him, were her trade. And of its ways some of the ins and outs and hardships were given him to comprehend, while he plied her with buns. With luck, the girl had, she informed him, just five shillings in hand each morning for fresh purchases; she could pick and choose then; but luck seldom kept strong two days at a time. Without it, shady doings had to be practised.

"There's days when p'r'aps I can only afford a bob's worth," said she. "Then I takes 'em home, and mixes 'em with last day's; there's art in that. But, lor'! that means goin' about an' doin' it like as you was 'ungry an' 'omeless, and you 'as to pick out the folk as don't reely want 'em. It wears yer out, that do, I can tell yer. If yer can afford good 'uns, you sets yerself down in a place where they know yer, and custom comes.

"Then you've to 'ave a good eye for what goes down. Up at Kensin'ton, they'll buy weeds, they will; anything

that looks as if it 'ad slep' in the country the night before. Whitechapel way, they won't. Geraniums 'll sell there, when Kensin'ton won't even sniff at 'em. Oh, you 'ave to be careful, that you do!"

Tristram asked, what worst strait she had ever been put to.

"Once I 'adn't got a penny to get a bed," she told him. "It did seem 'ard; las' summer that was. I walked the streets, an' kep' be'ind the bobbies; even then I 'ad a time, always 'ad to be on the move and not get rekonised. Bobbies is bad theirselves, yer know, sometimes; that they are! Up at 'Ampstead, and a bit out, they're the worst. They'll swear anything to cover theirselves. Oh, you know! Well, I tell yer, you want to be cured of thinking there isn't no 'ell; you do a night out in the street; that'll 'elp yer soul, that will!"

He discerned under her unblushing speech an honest girl, merely hardened in a sort of brazen modesty by the perilous independence of her calling. Twenty-four hours lay between her and the thing she would not blush to name, yet lived this life to be free from. There was beauty under the pinched face, certainly in the abundant soft hair; it caused Tristram to ask, if she had never thought of marrying.

A slight shudder coursed through her at the words. "Marry!" she said. "I saw father beat mother to death. I was a little 'un then. He didn't do it all at once, so they brought it in manslaughter, and he came out again in a twelvemonth. Then 'e 'ad another woman in, and began beatin' 'er, and when she went off he began beatin' me. Lor'! I've a mark now. One night I stole a shillin' out of his pocket and run. I've seen 'im since; but I know the ropes; 'e daren't touch me now! Marry! I ain't seen the man I'd trust yet."

She told her tale as though it held more comedy than

tragedy; thanked Tristram for the coffee and buns, but would take no money. "You be a detective, ain't yer?" she asked him, making him laugh out. He told her his plight. "Why," she said, "*I* know who you's lookin' for; come on, you'll be late. It's a greengrocer up from Chelsea what your man brings flowers for." The young man submitted himself to her guidance; after a hunt they found the tradesman they were in search of. Tristram got a clean draft, at last, and before noon had returned with the waggon and its empties to the carter awaiting him at Deptford. The indomitable man meant driving himself home; the hospital authorities interfered. Instead, he was driven.

He offered his deputy half-a-crown for the performance of the job; that being the full amount of his own pay, seemed to him fair wage. Tristram was reluctant to refuse it, but did, though it lowered him in the man's eyes that waggoning turned out not to be his trade.

Tristram had slept in the waggon for three hours while waiting for his return load. He arrived at his office about two in the afternoon, and took from his employer, with the most cheerful countenance, the reprimand due to him.

With less cheerfulness he received a few days later a similar dressing from home. He was indignant and amazed to hear that his lax hours were a cause of anxiety, and the reference was not merely to those owed to business. It was apparent that report of him had been gathered from his lodgings.

He gave no reason to his landlord for an immediate change of address. To his father he wrote but briefly on the same point. "I found he was not trustworthy," was a phrase which, under the circumstances, confirmed Mr. Gavney's fears.

CHAPTER XXXIX

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED

IN his youth it had been the proud hope at Jack Talbot's home that he would develop into a man of brain. Tales of him had been told showing that a veritable philosopher once slumbered in the makings of his mind. One morning — he was then at the tender age of seven — the breakfast summons having already sounded, his mother looked into his room and beheld him sitting on his bed, clothed only in one stocking, with the toe of his right foot hitched into the mouth of its fellow; there he sat lord of his time. His name had to be thrice called before his attention could be secured. "I'm finking!" he explained then, and seemed quite prepared to "fink" on. Nor did any single or repeated routing cure him of that early propensity to think at inopportune hours. Time brought about the cure; as he put on size and muscle it became apparent that he put off brain. Where these early brains go to is an unexplained phenomenon. If ever youth in the full possession of good average faculties deserved to be called brainless, it was Master Jack, when each year approaching manhood seemed to remove the quality of discretion further than ever from his grasp. Forethought had effervesced and evaporated from his handsome skull in a final effort of wit ingeniously displayed during his first year up at Oxford. At that seat of learning all soberness left in his senses had given up

the ghost. Allowance was extended to his youth: the authorities had damped him down for no more than a twelvemonth, but his brief record hardly made them look cordially for his return.

It pleased this youth to consider that his friend, Tristram Gavney, possessed brain to a degree that was awe-inspiring — an actual drawback to equality of intercourse. "You are so fearfully good!" was another of his involuntary certificates of character, an impediment he could have wished away.

Jack Talbot would roam round to Tristram's rooms at all odd hours, and imbibe from him a dim presentment of the solemnities of life. The Tramp's Allegro held as much sobriety as the Penseroso of his younger friend; yet a pleasant froth blew off this vintage of a light mind. Those who were charged anxiously with the consideration of his future had to own him lovable. He had a heart of most genuine affection, and would lay siege with meek devotion to the door of any friend he had unwittingly offended. His avoidance of his own father was explained with actual pathos by the forlorn youth, in moments when he believed himself miserable. "The sight of me puts him in the blues," said he. "Best I can do to make him happy is to keep out of his way. It's what I do; and the old boy hasn't an idea how I miss him!" An experiment of good conduct as a restorative to his parent's esteem seemed not to occur to him.

He confided to Tristram one day in gloomy retrospect, that his mother had met him in tears when he was sent down. "As if I could help it!" he expostulated. "Why the Dickens should she cry because the Dean couldn't take in a joke? I told her that. But no, she couldn't look at it in that light; thought it was my doing, and said as much, making me feel myself a brute! At last I had to say I'd run away if she cried another tear. 'Where

to?' she asked, not believing me a bit. 'London, East End!' said I: horridest place I could think of. I meant it too; swore I did, though it only made her laugh when I said so."

These dark shades and profundities of the youth's griefs may help the reader to a conception of his character; for, says the philosopher, "By sorrow you shall measure a man." Here then you have the plummet measurement of one, and shall expect no great tragedies where he is concerned.

Jack Talbot's eye for all feminine charm was not the least lively of his faculties; he wooed outrageously whatever was unobtainable and fair. His quaint preference was to be at the feet of one serenely happy in another's claims. Beauty wedded or betrothed lured him ever from the less arduous quest: of the favoured kind, he could sigh to six at a time, and be happy and unembarrassed in the company of them all. They laughed together over him, with no jealousy or rivalry in their hearts; to be "one of Jack's sweethearts" was at least a certificate of looks. His panting flight after these employed his days; at night, one may suppose, he had the whole fair half-dozen weaving him a rich tapestry of dreams.

Not that six was the constant limit of his mercurial passion. Rounding the Park with his friend he would have an eye on any silhouette that from a distance seemed shapely, till a nearer view of features should inform him whether or no he were the victim of love once more.

The women to whose charms he fell a free victim did him the credit of being nice as well as fair; employing him, they kept him out of scrapes. He turned the few notes he received from them inside out, to discover terms of endearment therein. "But women in love are so

cunning," said he; "when they feel sweetest, they won't write it."

Tristram was forced to laugh out at hearing his simple ways of giving entertainment to his heart. "My belief is," he remarked, "that if one of your pretties said, 'Come on!' you'd be off to the North Pole! It's the gallop not the goal you are after."

"Any magnet, so long as it doesn't mean matrimony!" retorted Jack. "Oh, I say, Gavney, don't you think monogamy the silliest, selfishest invention ever made by man?"

Tristram only defended it on the score of economy. Whereat — "Cold-blooded chap you are!" exclaimed his friend, "and, besides — no — why? There are just the same number of pretty women in the world whether we may marry them or not. They all have to be paid for somehow, I suppose; there you are then!" He thought that he had routed a specious economic fallacy, and let his friend know that his argument went nowhere. Tristram was but mildly interested to hear it.

"Ah, well, wait till you are in love," said the other, as though love necessarily involved numbers, and nodded a weight of experience at him.

The Tramp's theories made him seem more equable than he was in reality. Two things alone kept young Talbot from thinking him a bit of a muff — the strength of his arm, and his ability in the saddle. "You are devilish deep!" said Master Jack at his friend's silence when the eternal feminine became his theme; and he grew to have a respect for the other's mysterious aloofness from the random pursuits of youth.

One morning in summer he and Jack were trotting in company down the comparatively empty Row. Epsom was the world's centre for the day; to meet acquaintances in the denuded metropolis caused surprise. Young

Talbot was there for the sufficient reason that he had no pocket to take him elsewhere. "It's a plot of my old governor's," said he; "he has been keeping me short for months for fear I should be saving up to go."

"He might have slept in peace over that fear," said Tristram, who had himself abetted the plot, if it were so, by withholding a fresh loan till the week following. The empty aspect of town made him also more conscious of his fetters: he sighed to be off over solitary golden downs; crowded Epsom was not for him the attraction.

The day before Lady Petwyn had driven past him with only an abrupt nod and an off-wave of the hand. She was up for the races, and they had not seen each other for months. He imagined she must be in one of her adverse moods towards him, and bent on a curmudgeonly display; and without serious concern over the matter, wondered what could be his offence. It occurred to him that, just then, the change of bailiffs would be taking place; enough, for the nonce, to ruffle her against him. In his own bosom also the thought raised a sigh.

On his right a young girl with a groom came by at a foot-pace. Her head averting as they neared, the youth saw no more than the glow of a rounded cheek. His cursory glance was taken off by sight of Captain Rasselles pressing forward at a smart trot. A busy nod of recognition was thrown him; "I'm on duty," it seemed to say. The Captain whipped past.

A voice of music sang out, "What, have you not gone to the Derby?" Tristram's head swung after the sound.

At the fair girl's side Rasselles was bowing in happy apology for an unpunctual meeting. "You don't look half the martyr you've a right to be!" she retorted, "Why did you come?"

Living gold was the voice!

The youth beheld a loose knot of warm brown hair shaking its lights as she threw her horse to the gallop. Away they went west. The sound of her voice and laughter were borne away.

"That was a spanker!" cried Jack, sending an amorous calf's-head over his shoulder to mark the receding form. "And rides, doesn't she? Oh, ah!" He whistled bright as a bullfinch on his perch. "And what a lollipop of a laugh she's got!"

The fast diminishing view of the girl's gay beauty left him with a robbed appetite. "Oh, come on round!" he cried. "Let's go and meet them! Doesn't Rasselles look the lucky dog all over? He ought to introduce us."

Tristram held a like sentiment and wish; but the mere fact of random Jack voicing them kept him from joining in the chase. "You go!" said he, with seeming nonchalance. Off shot his companion, and left him to his own thoughts.

The perfection of a human voice rang in his ears. Since Doris had fired the heart of early romance for him, voices had been the lure of his soul. He had a presentiment that could he see the face which went with such sounds, he would behold his dream, and worship it. Scapegrace Jack, speeding to satisfy the lust of his eye, kept him back; hugging his ideal under the self-denying ordinance, he yet wantoned in the delicate commotions that seized his heart. It had rained gold on him from high heaven. Gazing at the blue, he let the voice seem over him like a lark's: rings of laughter and bubbles of light; ay, a very sunbeam of sound! Up and up, Pegasus was the steed who bore it on; the sun itself was its goal. How green stayed all the leaves of town; even at this season of dust and heat young spring still seemed to be

in them! And the words, the words! were they not to him? "Have you not gone to the Derby?" they cried: and, behold, he had not gone. Considering his love of horses it was a marvel. He astonished himself now that he had not; he believed he had made promises to go and broken them; and hoped that a dozen were upbraiding him for his breach of faith. Choosing to forget that the main cause had been benevolent friendliness for Jack, doomed to stay up in town, he hugged Providence as an ally for keeping him there. And for what? Merely that he might hear a voice!

Well, well! some madnesses are but life in excess. Here was youth exulting as youth will, drawing a new sense of eternity from the depths of the heart, and wondering how to apply it to the actual hours that ran by. The happy delirium lasted perhaps to the end of that summer's day; the memory of it stayed. He asked neither Jack Talbot nor Captain Rasselles to give his dream a face.

Two days later Lady Petwyn had left town again without once sending for him: planning soon to lay fast hands on him, she was the more pleased just now to affect the cold shoulder. Captain Rasselles the lady had seen; she bade him bring report of her favourite's progress. He had to admit that he knew less than she wished: it had become difficult to keep under observation one who went everywhere.

"Jack Talbot has caught on to him," said the Captain, "a well-meaning lad so far as he has any meaning at all; but the limit of his acquaintances I have failed yet to discover. If a man will lend him a fiver, he regards him as a friend, and claims his company while spending it. The consequence is, through him, your protégé knows a good many more than I know." He mentioned one or two doubtful reputations. "'Friends of Jack's' is his

word for them when I drop depreciatory remarks. He has a wonderful notion that whatever happens to be young is also harmless; and I believe it's true of himself. Like him? — who wouldn't? There's his danger: too many kinds take to him. All the same he has tact — or instinct — it comes to the same thing."

Lady Petwyn declared that among women he had none.

Captain Rasselles said, "You mean that he says things no one else would? He does that with us, too; it's his gift. He mixes well, yet never seems to lose himself; believes marvellously in his own eyes too — they are straight ones, I admit, and can read character so far as knowledge gives him a reckoning. Outside that he may stray; not that I've ever seen him caught yet; but of course a day will come when he'll get taken in. Has he a free purse?"

"He has pocket-money," said the dame.

"Well, there's that Lord Argent Ilkley, for one — a fellow with no interests but himself, and ambitious to have follow-my-leader played to him; talks plausibly too, and has wit, which your youth is fond of; he seems to have got hold of him lately, I hear; and wherever he can get a laugh, the fellow will go. Lord Argie gives it him, but it's a racketty that he's taking to; and I'd have you see I can't keep a perpetual net over your butterfly; an eye on him is all I can do. He looks fresh enough still."

"I saw him," nodded Lady Petwyn; "I'm keeping out of his way just now for certain reasons. Has he, peradventure, set eyes on your charge any of the few days when you had her in safe conduct?"

"Once, I think," was the Captain's reckoning.

"Did he seek your company?"

"Not specially. No, not at all, as a matter of fact. Was I to have drawn him?"

"No, just to have left him, as you did. I'm glad to

know. I'm an old woman with a theory, Captain Rasselles."

He asked that he might hear it.

"That, their virtues running contrary, it is recoil brings the sexes together. Woman by nature goes through her unripe stage, mellowing virtuously; while man, like the medlar, isn't ripe till corruption has touched him. Adam and Eve attack their apple from opposite sides: Eve bites through the green to get the red; and Adam through the red comes at last to appreciate the green. For general application, contemplate the youth of the two sexes wherever you have it before you. And preserve me from having to waste my time over the freaks who make the exceptions!"

With a serene confidence that the tonic she prescribed was fit and right, Lady Petwyn was contented to leave Tristram to whatever hands Fate might lay on him. Captain Rasselles had a more male appreciation of the differences which separated this youth from the average of his contemporaries, and held them in generous respect. But however he would have liked to keep a benevolent hand on him, it was not in his power now to affect the event. That Tristram had tact, was, to a man of the world, his surest safeguard. When manners make the man, Tact has henceforth become the only sure guardian angel of his soul; among the virtues it stands as a tailor among men.

Within a week of the conversation just recorded, an affair took place, under Lord Argie's tutorship, which put sharply to the test that quality which Captain Rasselles trusted him to possess.

Tristram was supping at the Hyperion one night, on Lord Argie's invitation; a third man failing to join them, the two had the table to themselves. Wherever Lord Argie feasted wine flowed; an unseasoned head began

soon to feel at a disadvantage in the company of that trained diner. Tristram followed his leader at a respectful distance, and was occasionally rallied for backwardness.

"My dear fellow," said Lord Argie, "let us keep our glasses on bowing terms. Where gentlemen dine no innovation of the Franchise should be permitted. In the days of toasts equality was a point of honour; now the toast is dying, and honour in drinking seems to die with it. When our present Premier goes, there will be hardly a man left who knows even how to propose a toast. It has become perfunctory, scarcely more than a political expedient. On occasions of social ceremony, woman and wine, the two great exalters of the human heart, have become divorced; actually we cause the sex to withdraw when the procession of the wine begins. Your guest mellows; you give him nothing better than a bottle to embrace. If you must be so niggardly, the wine-skin were a better substitute for the missing priestess: and we call ourselves a religious nation! Now, when we have concluded this shorn ceremony, you will allow me to conduct you to the courses that should follow; here, to finish a feast one has to go clumsily from place to place; the ballet and the banquet are no longer a unity; nor in the West is one allowed to dine off a bed."

Lord Argie's periods fell a little flat on the indifferently comprehending youth, till wine helped him to perceive their fun. Lord Argie himself improved as the meal advanced, and was occasionally humorous, extracting loud laughter from his guest. When the meal with its many courses was over the two stood very much on a par — sober in the legal and strict sense, and capable of a correct carriage — anything but sober in the essential. The big restaurant with its lights fizzed round the younger man's senses like a charged beaker of champagne; its bubbles

blew into his brain; the top of his head felt like a cork under pressure waiting to fly up.

His leader struck on his hat with the resolute air of a man who starts to the pursuit of pleasure. By his hat he could have passed muster before duchesses; the correctness of its slope was perfect. Thus with the sign-proof of sobriety topping him, he pushed a hand through Tristram's arm and led him out into the street.

"Shall we drive? Shall we walk? What do you say to the Tarantella?" were the questions which he answered to his own liking. Tristram was led to the place where to suit the incoming fashion of spectacular ballet the largest number of leg-artistes skipped nightly. There for an hour, till fairly wearied, he watched doll-like women-athletes in gauzes, spangles, and fleshings, tilting and spinning to an accompaniment of brainless noise as unentertaining to the ear as the rest was to the eye: he found neither virtue nor vice, nor human nature in the thing to attract him. On revealed anatomy Lord Argie indulged in a string of faint witticisms which helped to pass the time, till at the descent of the second curtain he conducted his companion to that nearer view for which he had the *entrée*.

Tristram was fain to admit that human nature was not lacking under the new focus. Behind its tawdry overlay of painting and canvas he discerned, not as the machine it had seemed from the auditorium, Life, monstrous enough, but recognisable.

The unceremonious ways and straightforward looks of these strutting sylphs amused him; they came naturally to talk, not waiting on introductions. A challenge of the eye, and a smile, led without affectation to converse as sensible as the average of a London drawing-room. If the manners were free, the language was clothed and respectable; they chattered of what interested them. Talk was most easy to him on those terms.

One little lady, all smiles, toying with his watch-chain, and chattering half on tip-toe to his cravat, slipped a visiting card into his pocket, and was quite honest and frank about the action. "Now you've got me next your heart," said she, "and 'll know where to turn when you feel lonely." She told him where she stood on the stage when the curtain went up, anxious, it would seem, to shine professionally before him; talked with a healthy pride of her physical fitness, and let him know the diet which secured it. He was genuinely sorry when the bell rang this gay working little gymnast back to her place.

"You'll look out for me?" she cried, as she flew, blowing him a kiss.

He nodded, laughing, and found some small amusement in tracking her out when the gaudy machinery of the spectacle again met his eye. To watch her at her evolutions gave him the human element otherwise missing.

He owned to Lord Argie as they strolled out into the streets again, that he preferred sense to flummery. "If they must kick," said he, "let it be for something! Oh, yes, the notion of decorative action is well enough, but it has to be beautiful."

"You sigh for beauty?" said his companion.

"And fun," appended Tristram.

"Beauty and fun — we call that joy," said the other. "All the world pursues it. I, now, have a thirst. There is a delectable club that brews the one liquid for which my present soul is yearning. I have the wanton thirst of a well-dined man; it requires coaxing. Come and share my felicity; we'll not part yet."

He named the club at which the subtle beverage was concocted. "The Gold-Button; you have not heard of it?" he enquired, and displayed the passport.

Tristram had not.

"That is one of its charms," said Lord Argie; "it is so little heard of. Few know of it, so it has not been overrun; just a circle of its own, no more. Of course a little mixed in the, ah — theatrical direction, say. But very passable indeed, as such things go. An ingenious old crank named Tollock runs it, an adept at keeping inside the ropes; legally, I believe, it can't be called a club, and therefore, as it is not disorderly, there's no loop-hole for outside interference. Enter the door, you are guest at a private house: I have the privilege of extending an occasional invitation to a friend. Please me by coming!"

Tristram gave an indulgent assent. "Oh yes," he answered, seeing it was expected of him.

"To-night," went on his companion, "there is some show on; we shall be just in time for it. Tollock's an inventive old boy; one never knows what he will be up to. The theatrical is his craze: I have seen things there I could really laugh at; a little naughty, now and then, but extremely nice. A couple of weeks ago there was a good idea, and capitally done — living marionettes, the notion. Droll, very droll, that was." He went on to give an indication of this last piece of old Tollock's ingenuity. "They come on, you know," said he, "with strings carefully made visible; therein lies the humour. Ha, ha!" The relish of comic happenings was traceable in his tones. "Off they start working by rote; cord jerks, up goes leg or arm; sticks sometimes, refusing to come down. When strings get mixed — that of course is done on purpose — well, when they become mixed, they become very, very mixed. Oh, very droll indeed!"

He chuckled naughtily at the memory.

Tristram saw laughable possibilities, and only a shadowy degree of objection; though he had sense to perceive that the flavour of such farce might very easily become rank. But experience, so far, had not taught him

to be squeamish; he had a friend's word for it that the thing was amusing; its humour seemed to cover such indiscretions as he sighted. Hearing finally that Jack Talbot was to be there, he was hearty in repeating his readiness to come.

"Martley told me he was bringing him," said his companion; "I don't suppose you'll meet any one else you know."

They were among the late arrivals, a crowd was already before them; a bluish atmosphere of smoke, hot and fragrant, noise of tongues and clatter of glasses filled the chambers into which they entered. They passed through a supper-room. "We will take our drinks on with us," said Lord Argie, securing bumpers for himself and his companion. Tristram looked round him; his eye took in gay groups; it was evident that here, at least, beauty crowned the revels according to Lord Argie's doctrine of the true decorum. The brief sight was enough to confirm vague premonitory suspicions. With the actual fact staring at him, "Of course, what else did you expect?" enquired reason; yet he had not troubled himself sufficiently to foresee the thing beforehand.

In the groups scattered about the room amid drinking and smoking, women's voices were loudest; the harsh bursts of unmusical laughter started with them, and with them ended; they laughed imperiously, commanding the tongues of their hearers to obedient homage; each unspontaneous cackle of merriment once started was slow to exhaust itself. Spirits are a genuine manufacture; but they ring a little crudely in the making.

The crowd was already setting towards the further chamber, at the far end of which hung plush curtains covering a stage. Those who waited sat expectant, faces and chairs turned in the one direction. Lord Argie was beginning to regard Tristram with a quizzical eye; his

colour was up; there was an interrogating challenge in his glance when the other spoke to him. Sighting the blond boyish head he liked, "I'm going over to speak to Jack," he said, and shook off his companion's arresting hand.

"Time" was calling impatiently from the crowd as he pushed his way forward. "Hullo, *you* here!" cried Jack with an ingenuous flush, beholding him.

"It seems I am," said Tristram; "and you?"

"Oh, I!" retorted Jack, "do I count? Here, sit down! Is this place new to you? 'tis to me; I came with Martley; seems queer, don't you think? but there's fun coming, they tell me. Ah, the lights are going down. Yes, but you, Gavney? well, I swear, I never expected to see you here." The boy hugged his arm cordially. Tristram understood that Jack was affectionately putting him down from the pedestal he had stood him on.

"Seats!" was called suddenly; a sighing of music was beginning behind the curtain; it rose and grew loud, drowning the thinning hubbub of voices; excitement became shrill in the swift beating of its bars. Lights went out.

For one moment the company sat buzzing in darkness; then a vertical shaft of light slit the pendent draperies; they swayed, parted, and disappeared, disclosing a miniature stage.

Amid pops of laughter and sharp fizzes of applause, Tristram stood up to go. "Sit down!" came an objecting cry from behind.

He stayed for one moment to lay a hand on his friend's arm, and spoke low. "Come out of this, Jack!" said he.

"Sit down, sit down!" came murmurs from behind.

The other looked up irresolute; from there to the door was a very ordeal to one alive to the fear of ridicule. "Are you really going?" temporised the boy.

Tristram's eyes widened. "I'm waiting to," he said with kind delay, adding in a bitter inflection of surprise, "Do you want to stay?"

Shame flew over the boyish face. "Don't know that I do," he grumbled. "No, I'll come with you!"

He was on his feet at once.

The murmurs behind were growing more definite. Tristram linked an arm in his friend's.

At the door, from one of a standing group, dulcet remonstrance met him. He recognised Lord Argie's voice.

"My dear fellow," exclaimed that worthy, "what means this unreasonable display? Do you really insist on going? And Talbot too, Talbot? What, both so young yet so inexperienced!"

Tristram felt sensitive youth beside him. "Tastes differ," said he; "if that surprises you, the inexperience must be yours." He passed with a cold salutation before Lord Argie's sneer could fit itself to words.

Jack Talbot swore softly to himself, to be helped through the unpleasantness of his singularly enforced retreat. Laughter behind him shot stings into his flesh. Scarcely noticed, in fact, he believed that all eyes were at him; that the whole air was charged with laughter for the same cause.

"Oh, damn you, Gavney!" he cried, for audible relief to his ridiculed sensations, so soon as they were well through. His companion hurried him on.

In the street he beheld a white face; Tristram rocked bodily against him for support. Initiative and virtue had gone out of him; he hung a quavering lip, and stared at pavement and sky. "Yes, yes," he muttered, ready to assent to anything his friend might say. His chest fought for one big breath of air; the relief of a clean atmosphere swept over his swimming brain. "Jack!" he shuddered, "Jack!" showing a strange aspect then to the friend he

had led captive. "You were a good chap to come with me!" was what he got out at last.

"Was I?" queried the other, amiably surprised. "You didn't give me much choice!"

"You were——" Tristram's grasp tightened upon his arm to feel that he had him still, "just something clean to catch hold of. Ah!——" His voice sounded the depression of his soul: "Dear fellow!" it came back to, for a refrain.

That was all very well; there was yet the march home to be done. Jack was frank in warning him of the difficulty. "Hold on to me!" he cried, beholding the advance of a seductive figure. "I'm a cork waiting to go pop!"

The combustible nature of the creature showed no diminution as they advanced. A distressing inability to let well alone took hold of him and sent him off on the retrospective tack; wavering unsteadiness began to mark his retreat. It was as though Joseph, after virtuous flight, should have begun to enquire—"I wonder what she is doing now with my coat!" and should in spirit have agonised for a peep back through the key-hole.

Saints can tell of the danger of flight conducted on such lines. Naughtiness of mind fast turned ill-conducted retreat into a demoralised rout. Tristram found presently that there was no holding the volatile youth to his side. The streets seemed to be perilously charged with attractive material. At sight of it Jack blew and puffed, becoming marvellously discomposed when night-fashionable pavements had to be crossed.

Tristram from habit pulled whenever a contrary tug reminded him that he had in charge a will other than his own; otherwise cloud fell over his consciousness, he thought more of himself. There settled on his brain a steady exasperation lending heat to his blood; a vague sense urged him to walk and walk for remedy to the driv-

ing tumult within. "Jack, Jack!" he cried admonishingly, as that youth's comments on passing faces became more and more caressing in tone. He was whipping his head this way and that; almost any object now struck him as sweet.

"By George! that's a pretty filly!" was presently his cry. He swung round: saw a laughing eye look back at him.

Where wealth and poverty touch so closely on the borders of Soho, Tristram found himself standing solitary; bitter reflections were left to him over his evening's work. He was well rebuked for his pains; virtue in town was, it appeared, ridiculously out of place.

Standing under the shadow of an arcade he felt a hand laid on his arm; timidly it seemed. A girl addressed to him a few words with a queer catch of breath. Voice and face were pleasant, half-familiar, too; abundant fair hair shadowed the features toward which he gazed. She grew bashful under his eye.

Strange natural little petition coming in the roar of great London's streets: she had but asked him for a kiss.

In the darkness of a small chamber high up on a dimly lighted stair, the fragrance of flowers brought memory to Tristram. So charged was the air with sweetness that it seemed to caress his face on entering. He looked at his companion with more attention; was London after all so small?

In the gloom he saw a large basket stacked with white blossom standing under a bare window-sill. The girl was closing the door when with a quick gesture he stayed her, and said in haste, "You have had a bad day; you haven't sold your flowers?"

It was true. Upset and damage had befallen them earlier in the day. Even at night when their defects

showed less visibly, they had failed to find a market. "Clove pinks, most on 'em," said she. "If they gets messed they looks bruised-like, and there's no freshness in 'em. It's no use washing 'em, they never looks the same."

For all that Tristram declared himself a belated purchaser; his tone was constrained and unplausible. She struck a light, and stolidly lifted the basket for him to view the ruin. "Don't say I sold 'em to yer in the dark," she said, with a sort of incredulous indifference in her tone. "How many d'yer suppose yer want?"

To the poor girl in search of her capital amount, such small custom as he was seeming to offer was of little value at the present hour of the market. Tristram picked out a bunch. "This will do," he said.

The coin that touched her palm caused her to send a quick look up to his face; it seemed unbelievable munificence. And she saw him preparing to go.

"Oh, yer be good; yer be good!" she cried, and caught his hand. He laughed rather coldly. "There, there, you can get your pick in Covent Garden to-morrow," he said, and nodded, wishing to be gone.

Recognising him, her eye became illumined. "Ah then, it is you! I thought how 'twas like yer; but yer wasn't so dressed up then." She breathed her wonder, and raised a bashful look on him. "O Lor'! Yer be a good friend, yer be; and you a gentleman!" It was the old wonder of Polly Tilt under like circumstances; but this girl was no longer asking to be kissed. "Oh, sir," she cried, "sir!" and shook her head, unable to speak; she drew in her lips, hanging an ashamed countenance over a breast that heaved; looking anywhere but at him now.

Tristram held her hand; a slight frown showed speculation in his mind. Suddenly he flushed and turned about. "Good-night!" he called abruptly, and in

another moment was making a determined exit down the stairs.

When he found himself once more in the street, his thoughts found expression in no pleasant laughter. Casual charity seemed to him the very meanest protection to extend to a woman whose daily chance was the earning of a few shillings to stand between her and an outcast's lot. The act bore to him the taint of hypocrisy; no high consciousness of virtue carried him on his way.

Traversing the quieter West-End streets where traffic was now grown scant, he marked a cab draw up a few doors ahead of him, and a well-attired damsel preparing to dismount. A corner of her finery became entangled in the step as she was about to spring. Feeling herself going, "Catch me!" she cried, and fell into the arms of a charming youth.

Decidedly charming she thought him, realising that she was safe. "I beg your pardon!" and, "Oh, thank you so much!" she fluttered, hanging elaborately upon his arm to recover breath. Thus situated, she smelled a sweet fragrance, and beheld white flowers beneath her nostrils.

"What, were these for me?" she exclaimed with delightful laughter. "Have you waited long?" She made no pause for his answer. "Here," she cried, "wait one moment while I get out my key. Will you pay the cab for me?"

Tristram performed her bidding, and returned with hands empty. "So many thanks," she said again, seeing that the thing was done. "Now, I suppose you won't come in?"

Her sprightly laughter belied the incredulous speech. "Why, wherever are the flowers gone to?" was the quick exclamation that followed.

The cab was then pursuing its way toward the far end of the street. Tristram spoke no word of the flowers' whereabouts.

The lady of the latch-key stood looking at him with pleasant eyes.

CHAPTER XL

THE WOMAN ON THE ROAD

VERY dutifully Tristram fulfilled the obligations of his majority, and received his father's quiet thanks when documents were signed. London was the scene of their meeting. "It is hardly a matter for thanks," said the young man coldly, too conscious of compulsion to wish for any gracing of the act.

"It should not be," retorted Mr. Gavney; "but I have to thank for what most fathers take as granted. My son has not always seen that advantage and duty lay together."

Tristram accepted the reproach and spoke openly. Having resigned so much, he asked now to be released: mere freedom for himself was the payment he begged. His voice was uncompromising and cold. So obstinate a recurrence to old folly seemed to Mr. Gavney a graceless effrontery put on merely to annoy. He requested to be told what fine plans his son had for shaping his own future.

"None," said Tristram curtly. "At present my only wish is to be home again, and away from London."

His face wore the weary look brought on by wasted hours; but his wear of mind was greater than the wear of body, which was now making him wish to return home.

"You forget, perhaps," objected Mr. Gavney, "that

your reputation there does not stand high. You have no other proposal to offer?"

"Except to leave the country," said Tristram, stung to bitterness. "I might go out and join Raymond: he would have me, in spite of what you call my reputation, I fancy."

"I should be sorry," replied his father, "to let Mr. Hannam hear that I had assented to any such proposal. To send you to his son! I wonder you can name it; it shames me to speak of you to him after the division you were instrumental in bringing about. I beg you not to speak of it. It is for that reason that I refuse to have you living at home for the present: the disgrace you have been the cause of is too flagrant, too recent; I will not seem to countenance you. Your poor mother, however, wishes to see you; the thought of you is a perpetual sorrow to her; in a month's time, I have said, you may come down for a week or so. I shall be away then; Mr. Hannam also. I trust that in my absence you will be able to behave yourself. But you have yet to earn your reinstatement under my roof. You may atone for, you cannot obliterate, the past. As for your breaking with the present arrangement, remember that my word has been pledged for you, that you are not free for another year. Perhaps you care little for that! You cause me to speak bitterly, my son."

Mr. Gavney, blind to the subtler elements of his son's malady of body and soul, saw enough to cause sharp trouble to a heart not devoid of paternal feeling. The sight made him raise higher the voice of authority: he became dictatorial: his son had at least to understand that he ruled under his own roof: the froward young man was not to imagine that independence awaited him there.

Tristram listened, but would make no promises, his silence, though unlike him, seemed to indicate the rebellious spirit; and his father began to think it might be

very well that he should be with his mother for a while; experience taught him to hope that her weak words might have more effect than all the wisdom he could utter.

Mrs. Gavney was ready to confirm his belief. "Send him to me," she said, when her husband's report reached her, and began counting the days till she could have the prodigal in her arms and work her gentle will with him.

Her conquest was destined to be easy; she had no longer to fight that high belief in himself which had been Tristram's bulwark of old. The understanding that he had sacrificed his natural birthright had at last entered like iron into his soul; and had found there the wreck of his youth's pride; and the last act of it had been this signing away of his freedom without any previous bargaining for his own release to follow. He was generously reluctant to press his claim over a monetary transaction; moreover, for all his bitterness, he was now humble about himself, and had, as he told his father, no plans at all; nor did he understand how fatally that fact had helped him to his overthrow.

His silence under his father's reproaches had meant, not opposition, but submission to the demands made on him; yet the surrender threw him back in the worst mood of all to the conditions from which he was struggling to escape.

A couple of weeks later a letter from Lady Petwyn came to revive hopes he had long since let go. "So," wrote the old dame, steadfast in following her purpose, "you still prefer London to Cob's Hole as a solution of the housing question? And the East End and its Dockers are a connection that fall in sufficiently with your moral notions? Truly you have strained at a needle's eye and swallowed a camel; I trust it may bring you to Heaven."

She sent him late greetings on the attainment of his majority, and after her customary flick of compliments, that strove to sting, made a renewal of her old offer. In true Elizabethan character, the pecuniary side of her proposal was reduced to well-nigh niggardly proportions. After a mischievous generosity to him, spread over recent months, she chose now sourly to test him: let him know bluntly that bets and some still more foolish extravagances of the last year had crippled her resources, and that those who took service with her must share the consequences. "Do just as you like about the matter!" she finished abruptly, and branched away into other topics. She omitted to tell him that Cob's Hole was about to undergo a visitation from the sanitary inspector, without much likelihood of passing the very lenient official standard. Her anxiety was to get hold of him before submission to his quixotic conditions should be forced on her from outside; and she understood him well enough to guess that the diminished salary, as explained by her, would rather help than otherwise to draw him into her net. Anyway, it pleased her spiteful old heart to indulge in that snap of the purse-strings. Like the Cumaean Sibyl when driving the superb Tarquin to a harder bargain, she was willing for Tristram to feel that procrastination had not meant worldly wisdom.

The poor fellow was in the mood to be her bond-servant for the merest pittance; her comparison of London to Cob's Hole, just then, seemed to shatter the purist objections which had once stood between them.

He answered gratefully and wrote plainly of the offer to his father; having a plan now, he was urgent in renewing his petition. Mr. Gavney in reply spoke scornfully of MacAllister's shoes; hardly fit standing for a gentleman, he thought, and wondered that Lady Petwyn should propose it. The same letter gave a date for his

son's home-coming; fear of this threatening prospect made it immediate.

Three days later, the hour of dusk brought Tristram to his journey's end. As he stood in the doorway there came through the hall the quick flutter of raiment; a bright running laugh greeted him, and he saw Marcia's face flying towards him with welcoming eyes. "My Trampy!" was her cry.

With a sudden inward pain he caught up her hands fearfully, and held them between his lips and hers. "Don't, don't kiss me," he said; adding, to appease the beautiful trouble of her eyes, "Marcia, dearest," and let her arms go round him then.

Her face was still straining for his: "Not kiss you, Trampy? oh, why?" she asked tremulously, and taking hold of his hands, with the fondling demonstrativeness which belonged to her when stirred, drew them in an embrace about her cheeks. "My Trampy, my own Trampy," she cried, holding him fast.

He put her gently back from him at arm's length, and fondly regarded her. "How beautiful you are," he exclaimed, "and to think that it's only a year!"

She laughed troubled: "What compliment is that to the Marcia you left behind, — or to me now, if you won't even kiss me!"

"I do, I do!" he cried, caressing her hands.

She took possession of him; and turning him to the light, she asked, "Are you ill, then?" and beholding him, cried suddenly, "You are!" Her voice became tender and compassionate. "Ill, ill! Oh, my poor Tris!"

He could not bear it: breaking from her scrutiny, "How is mother?" he asked; of the rest he left Marcia to give news as she chose.

She told him their mother's door would be open to him whenever he went up; he heard that no one else was in the

house. Bitterly his mind welcomed the repose which his coming had secured. "Oh, holiday!" he murmured, and smiled to let her know it was she he meant.

Marcia said: "I shall be on the cubby-room hearth-rug when you come down."

"Then we'll be twins?" he answered. They squeezed hands as they parted. Tristram went upstairs.

His mother's room was darkened, save for firelight, when he entered. Soft aromatic warmth greeted him, awaking childish memories. The very carpet that he trod seemed to say "hush," reminding him to be gentle in this place. He crossed to where he knew she would be lying, and whispered "Mother!" for her to hear.

"My boy!" she murmured, "my boy!"

It was the old form of greeting that she kept for him.

The young man knelt down, letting his brow be taken to her lips. "Mother me!" said he; and was like a child on her breast. Comforting his face against her hands much as Marcia had done when his kiss had been refused her, he began almost babbling for good news of her health.

She said less than an invalid might; her mind seemed pre-occupied with other things. Stroking his head where it lay in her lap with hands whose touch seemed to plead: "Have you come back to disappoint us all?" she said.

He knew whose word was between them then.

"I don't know," he replied, "why you should be disappointed. Can I help wanting to come back?"

"You can please your father, if you wish."

"Not in everything."

"But in this," she urged.

"Oh, mother," he sighed, "all I want is a little peace! give it me, give it me! I have only come to you for that."

He wondered whether after all to go right away would not be best. These two hearts of home did not divine

what sudden reproaches they started upon him now. To put out three months of his life he needed a new world, a new birth. Marcia's beloved face reaching up to him to be kissed, had shown him suddenly the unlooked-for barriers; before that moment he had not guessed what they would be. He laid his face against his mother's knees and prayed without words — prayed that one little portion of his life might be swept away, for it was not his: he could swear it was not his! Convulsively his breath heaved, giving out no sound. He had come back to the hearts of love only to find agony there.

Mrs. Gavney's secluded, almost lonely existence had made her mind a harbour of retrospect: her memory of the child that had been was fuller than her knowledge of the young man now laying his head for balm against her breast. But his way of showing the fondness he had for her — a sort of wooing reverence with ever an under current of play — had encouraged her from early days to retain that right which some mothers have to resign.

When she put to him one of those individual questions which she, only, might ask, which had once or twice in his life come to him from her, sacredly requiring a response, he was tenderly quick to admit the claim; he had even expected it to be made.

He waited; the question came: "Have you been good, my dear?" and he answered it: "No, mother, not very."

Then there was silence, only faintly broken at last by her sigh, as she gathered up courage to speak a firmer word, since on her heart he had in confession laid the sacrifice of his pride.

It was not to be then. Though no other word was spoken, he saw what request would come, and could not bear it then. He rose quietly to his feet. "May I go down now?" he asked, waited to receive her assent, pressed his cheek to hers, and went out, knowing in his

heart that he must grant it later, since in all the world no hand was so strong over him as hers; once it might have been Marcia's: it was his mother's now — because he had lost his pride.

He and Marcia, when dinner was over, returned to his room for the "hearthrug evening" they had promised themselves. "Let us have only firelight!" said Tristram, seeing that the hearth's welcome had been prepared for them, though the windows lay opened wide to the late September air.

He approached to put out the lamp. Marcia, watching him as he stooped his head under its rays, cried: "Tristram, you are grey!" She parted the wave over his left temple, and drew out a hair to witness the truth.

"And there are more!" she said.

"You may have them all," he answered. "Keep them to remind you of your twin-that-was; — not lost but gone before. You see I'm the first of us to age."

Some sadness in his tones set Marcia hankering. "Trampy, you have a grief, and you won't tell it me."

"Grief enough, Marcia. Here am I for no more than a week. All the more let us be happy to-night!"

But happiness was hardly to be the note of this first meeting, grateful though they were to be together once more.

"Ah!" Marcia said. "And it was I helped to send you away. You are letting the sight of you reproach me now; yet I thought I did right." She closed with him, crying: "I take back what I said, dearest, then. Do you — do you feel bound?"

He hesitated: did he feel bound? No. Yet he would bind himself, he knew.

She pressed her meaning upon him, saying: "Don't listen to me now, or anybody; choose for yourself! That is right sometimes."

He shook his head: doubt of himself in the last months had come to be his familiar; strange opposite to his state a year ago.

"What has altered your mind, Marcia?" he enquired. "That used not to be easy."

He was the reason of her change. "Do you like London, so much, then, yourself?" she said, eyeing him.

He kept in his heart the cry, "Do I like sackcloth and ashes, and dead-sea apples!"

She recurred then to her thought that he must be ill, and pressed him to own it.

"I don't know, dear," he said. "Old age! it's a mere feeling and may pass. Let us leave off talking about me! You, Marcia, what have you done? you are altered too. Is nobody in love with you yet? You talk always of this Harry of yours now; but she is a girl. When shall I see her?"

"Just now she is away at Portruddock with Lady Petwyn. Yes, Trampy, you will have to be friends with her; she's my very great one. Think! I even have my days of liking Lady Petwyn because of her. We talk often of you too; ah! and I've heard things from her; all nice ones, I mean."

"Oh, have you? And where does she get them from?"

"Happens to have been over your ground, my Tris, being in Lady Petwyn's hands. She told me about you and Lady Tetheridge, and the pug, and the bull."

"Cow," Tristram corrected her.

"Well, and the cow-boy, then; oh, much more than you ever told *me*. And to think of you very nearly laying down your life for a wretched pug!"

"No; but to die a cow-boy!" said Tristram, as though that were a thing he could still heartily wish.

"I couldn't have forgiven you," declared Marcia.

"I could myself!" he all but sighed. "After all, one

can forgive one's self most things — up to a certain age; not after."

"Most things, not some," said Marcia. "They stick, for no reason that one can see; and yet one wouldn't have them away. Oh, one I would! and yet that wasn't my fault. But it seems as if it was!" Her eyes looked back on tragedy.

"Anything I know?" asked Tristram.

"No," said Marcia; "it was after you went. Aunt Julia did the deed; and is ignorant about it to this day, I imagine!"

She told the story. It is here, as Tristram heard it.

"I was out with her one morning," said Marcia, "along the Pitchley Road, at the bottom of the hill where the turnpike used to be. We met a woman coming along, decent-looking, but very shabby and threadbare. She wasn't interesting; just the dull-faced, hard-working sort; *grind* more than poverty was what marked her. She stopped us; I thought at first to beg; it was to ask whether she could find any work about here — odd jobs of needle-work, or anything, she didn't care what. She talked in a listless way, dead-beat; one could see from the dust on her clothes that she had come a good distance, and she had a way of pulling herself up and falling together again, that meant genuine weariness trying to keep up an appearance.

"Well, I felt sure that Aunt Julia knew of nothing, and wasn't likely to offer her any work herself; and yet in a sort of sham benevolent way she began talking to that woman, and got at who she was, and where she had come from, and the rest of it. She was a soldier's wife, she told us, off the strength, and his regiment had gone out to Malta or somewhere; it was the usual sort of thing, she had to make a living for herself while he was away. She mentioned Chiltham as the place where he had last been

quartered. 'Oh,' said Aunt Julia, 'I used to stay there!' and began talking of all the officers' wives she had known, quite brisk, and chattery, and condescending; you know that manner of hers. I suppose she imagined she was showing interest in the woman's story. Anyway she began presently naming this person and that person, and gossiping about them, and the woman either knew them or knew of them; said she had worked for one or two, before the regiment went away in which she was known. It was quite a genuine-sounding story, and no begging in it. And there went Aunt Julia with — 'Then I suppose you knew Mrs. So-and-So?' or 'Was Colonel So-and-So's family still there?' and 'How many have they now?' all questions of that sort. And the woman went on nodding, and got quite cheery and interested, and quick in her answers; and all the time one could see the sort of natural expectation she had that something was to come of it. I suppose we were there a good five minutes, with Aunt Julia drawing the woman out, and getting her to talk; and while it went on, I just had to stand and say nothing. *I* had no money myself; there was nothing I could say, nothing I could do, to put an end to it.

"I began to think at last that Aunt Julia was really trying to find out her character before giving her something to do, or that she had some one in her mind to send her to. Five minutes! my dear Tris; and then, in her prim, quick way of collecting herself when she finds she has been wasting time, Aunt Julia gives her a friendly nod, and says, 'Well, you seem to have known some very nice people, and I hope you will get something to do soon. Good-day to you!'

"That was the end; we dismissed the interruption and resumed our course; I never felt so like the scum of the earth as I did then. All the way up that long hill Aunt

Julia talked of Chiltham people, and things, continuing her reminiscences. As I listened, her dense complaisance over the thing was I think what crushed me most; my back burned as though I were being morally branded; I would rather die than repeat that sensation!

"It takes—how long to get up that hill? Ten minutes, I might have said once; a year I think now. At the top of it — what moved me I don't know — I turned and looked back.

"Trampy, there was that woman standing where we had left her, looking at us, looking at us still! And I feel as though she stood there now, had stood there ever since, and would go on standing there for ever!"

"Oh, my aunt!" said Tristram in brief tones: emphatic showing of his mind.

He gave a slight shudder, and added in a much more moved voice.

"Marcia, one half of civilisation is like that woman standing in the road."

CHAPTER XLI

A LETTER FROM A DEAD HAND

MR. GAVNEY'S announcement of his early return was the unargumentative way he chose to indicate the time for his son's visit to terminate. He found it easier to be firm from a distance with his offending offspring, who had quick ways of the tongue, which in conversation left him at a disadvantage.

Tristram saw the letter first in his mother's hands; she gave him its contents, saying afterwards, "Then the day after to-morrow my boy goes back to his work?" It was spoken simply, with as little interrogation showing as possible.

Tristram answered, "Do not trouble yourself; I promise I will make room for him, mother." She let that appear a full settlement of the question between them. Kissing him she said, "You are no trouble to me, my dear; I trust you will never be that. If you would only come to me sooner sometimes ——" She paused, and added softly, "My boy and I understand each other, do we not?"

He evaded an answer, saying with much fondness, "I understand what you wish, mother." It left her satisfied.

He was intent then on a long-delayed visit, and spoke of being out for the rest of that day. A wish to see his old Sage once more, and to avoid for a few hours his Aunt Julia on her return, gave him a double motive for

absence. Marcia, hearing what he proposed, told him he might find the dear old man unable to receive him; she had heard rumours, though they were but vague. Tristram said, "I must see him!" and went off, even at the risk of a fruitless errand.

A sudden desire had seized him to have the old man's hands on his head before he went back to town. He wished to take with him, if go he must, all the blessing that was possible: utterly without trust in himself, his dependence was on others now. London to his thoughts spelled fiery failure; his weakness and his strength lay in the contact of his fellows. Here, at home, he shuddered to think into what a gulf that weakness had brought him down; yet he dreaded that his shuddering was but a passing fit and soon to be over.

Marcia had forewarned him truly. "You must not see him," he was told in answer to his petition. For a long time he held out, declaring, "But I must! Does he not remember me?" he asked. The faithful housekeeper said, "He talks of you sometimes." "If he saw me, then?" She shook her head. "You would be a stranger," she told him.

That struck cold to his heart.

He saw finally that he must accept her ruling, and begged only one favour. "Mention me to him," he said. "Say that I have been; 'the Tramp,' call me. I wanted him to give me his blessing — want it still, if he will send it. He does not remember, perhaps, that just a month ago — he always told me I was to come and see him then — I came of age. He said he had a message for me; and I think he would remember it. Remind him also of my aunt, my Aunt Doris, Miss Foley; you saw her once. He was very fond of her, I think."

"Your aunt?" said the good lady. "Yes; I believe he quite loved her; her portrait is in his room now."

"Oh, my love to him!" cried Tristram, fetching a breath.

Very late indeed he returned home that night. Steady rain had been on him for hours as he tramped, striving to work off the despondency that oppressed him. Utterly fatigued, he crept into the house, fit only for bed and oblivion to cover him.

He was surprised to hear sounds of movement still about the house. It was then close on one o'clock. In the passage he met a grey swathed figure bearing a candle, and recognised his Aunt Julia in dressing-gown and capless. She gave him a witheringly cold greeting. "You keep your old hours," she said to him.

"They seem to have infected you, my dear aunt," was the retort which relieved him of her presence.

Marcia coming on him at the stairhead explained matters. She seemed relieved to see him, saying in soft haste, "The poor little mother: no danger, only great pain. It is her head. She has been asking for you."

"Oh!" cried Tristram, with a pang of self-reproach for being absent. "Has she wanted me for long?"

"Some hours ago she asked for you first; go very softly."

"I met Aunt Julia just now," said Tristram.

Marcia nodded. "Yes; she does no good; she has been talking, and of course, sourly, about you. The mother wants you to comfort her."

Tristram slipped noiselessly into his mother's room. He heard her moan, and knelt down by the bed, laying cool hands on her. The dear head lay like fire in his touch.

A sigh of relief shivered to him, "Tristram?" said a whisper.

He answered "Yes," hushing her not to speak. But still she said, "You? — you?"

"It is I, little mother," he answered.

"Ah, I thought ——" Pain ended the attempt to speak.

"Don't think, don't think, dear head, until I've cured you," he pleaded.

"You can," she whispered back to him. "So late, my dear," was presently sighed. Yes, Julia had been talking.

"You hurt yourself if you speak," he said. "Don't try to!"

"You hurt me," she said, "so long away; I wondered ——" Dim thoughts of him a runaway from duty had entered her brain. To resolve the matter she said, "To-morrow, dear, you go?"

He said, "Yes."

"You will? to please your father?"

"I will to please you!" he sighed, and bowed his head to her pillow, that he might feel how near she was to him, as he sealed up another year of his life to give comfort to her heart.

She was quiet at once, submitting to the soothing touch he laid on her. He had still that virtue, and began to know it now. The pain shot into him; he received it from her. More, let more come! He welcomed it, knowing that the longed-for relief must be coming now. "Poor mother, was this what you were bearing?" thought he, to steady himself to the task, and closed his eyes for utter darkness to be his help.

Shocks like the beating of red-hot hammers went from back to front of his brain. Her voice rewarded him at last: "You are doing me good," she said.

He knew by her tone that there was more pain to come.

It was to be the emptying of a fire from one brazier to another. Presently he could no longer move his hands; they dragged and lay passive. "I am much better," she said.

Yes, he knew that: no answer came from him. Silence flowed over the couch inviting sleep to one. After a while there was a slight sound in the room. Marcia had returned. She came and leaned over the bed.

"She is asleep," was the welcome word that presently fell to Tristram's ear.

His hands dropped away; he turned to rise. "Marcia," he whispered, "Marcia! help me, I am quite blind!"

She saw him lift a drawn face; quickly her arms were round him; he got to his feet, staggering. Then she said no further word, but took him up bodily and carried him to his room.

"She was suffering this," he smiled as she laid him down. Marcia would have done more for him. "Go, go!" said he; "it will pass; then I can undress." So he lay, waiting for time to bring a sensible decrease to the strain, heedless altogether of wet clothes chilling upon his limbs, while in his brain raged that fire.

A very dread of giving in sent him early up to town the next day: to break down at the last would seem indeed a pitiful begging off. If he were to be ill, he thought, he might as well be ill there where nobody need know. He would not have his father come upon him so. In certain directions, it seemed that he still had his pride. His old trick of hating to be thought ill, was as strong in him as ever.

At home they had no letters from him for three weeks; when he wrote, it was briefly, giving little news. Marcia, looking at his handwriting, said, "He is not well." It was the one sign of his state that Tristram could not conceal; the fact that he wrote from the private ward of a hospital was never guessed. Those who expected him in the city and at the West End believed he was taking holiday, till in the beginning of November he reappeared. He seemed then to have been anywhere but at health

resorts, and his superiors, noting with what flagging energy he applied himself to work, drew their own conclusions. At a later date, that month's absence from lodging and office counted for something in those black-book reckonings of him which were soon to follow.

Obstinate pride, of that physical sort which was still left to him, made Tristram slow to admit that he was suffering from anything but a tardy recovery from illness. It was the fault of town that he could not get back his strength, he told himself. The delusion could not last.

"I feel ill through and through," he owned, when finally he sought medical advice.

"You are," was the doctor's practical summing-up and verdict after examining him: he spoke definitely.

Tristram had to face stern facts. The doctor was urgent in counselling him to quit London for a time and return to his home. Alas! however much he wished it, that was the one thing he could not do. The mood that had brought him in sickness back to town made him feel now that to return invalided to the home that did not welcome him, would be ignominy. Moreover — there was no moreover — outlook became obstructed. Dark doubt troubled his brain: bitter enough were the thoughts that came to him, but they brought with them no plans for the future.

Out of them grew features he could not mistake: he saw how one by one the foundations of his independence had been struck away. The bondage into which he had fallen was entering to become part of his flesh. Could he even say much longer that he possessed limbs and a brain that were truly his own? Was his body his own? Did he possess it now? The question tormented him. It had been his, and again it had not been. Could he resume what he had once let go; or was this the secret of his fate:

the Evil Chance so long evaded, come face to face with him at last? Was "No!" to be the sudden and final answer to all the eager interrogations of his blood?

"But others!" He cried out against the injustice, looking round him on the life of associates on whom no such thing as this seemed to fall. "Others!" echoed back at him from the hollow of his own heart. "Do you come now, only now, to claim fellowship with them?"

He did not. Passionately his soul cried out for solitude, for the breath and space for over a year denied to him; that he had not known while, about his life, had spun the pleasant coil of acquaintance, so far removed from fellowship itself. Anywhere, anywhere! the aspiration filled his heart, bidding him escape from bricks, and mortar, and crowds; and thin and bloodless and cold seemed the mere word that held him back. Nay, did not the medical advice he had received free him from that? He recognised its force as giving him release, not its direction: he could not, he told himself, go home. Where then? And as in certain moods, anywhere to a man comes in effect to mean a somewhere very much defined — to the Devil, for instance — so with Tristram, anywhere grew to have a pointed meaning of its own — not to the Devil this time; flesh and spirit were very sick of him.

While in this mood two missives reached him, not without import concealed or expressed, though tardy over the errand they were set to perform. The one was from Lady Petwyn, announcing herself up in town, with more circumstance than usual, prepared to keep open house, and to give entertainment to her world. Tristram, apparently restored to favour, was bidden to present himself with speed.

The other: he opened a letter covering enclosures. It was from the housekeeper of his old Sage, to say how tardily, though not through any negligence of hers, his

message had been delivered, bringing him at last these. What were they? A line in the crippled handwriting of age, showing intellect worn thin after honourable toil; yet in the childish sentences manifesting a tender remembrance of him. "From your Aunt Doris with her love, to be yours the day you become a man," were the words which took him to the inmost sanctuary of all. Deep blue-eyed regards from the happy spaces of infancy seemed on him as he broke that seal.

"My Trampy," were the first words that met his eyes, making them blind. He kissed before he could read on; and became a child again, in love for the dear hand that had sent him remembrance from so far away. It was herself; every word brought her back to him; not dead — living, she gave him her love for the day which was to make him his own master, and a man. "A good man," said her faith in him, having waited all these years to reach its goal. Could it but have come sooner! A simple thing to cry. It was grievous coming to him now. She looking ahead, loved and believed in him. "My Trampy," she wrote, more than once, as though to catch back to her heart its dear grown fellow whom years were to have made so little strange.

This was one of the things she wrote: "I never found your heart difficult to read; your very secrets used to look at me out of your eyes, so that I have had to look away, and pretend that I did not know them. That was difficult sometimes. Sweetheart, that has been a pleasure, to think that years hence there will be a man with those same eyes which I am not to see again; and yet do see. I carried them away with me here, to the south of France. Will my Trampy remember me as well as I see him fourteen years from now? I loved him; oh, well; let him be sure of that!"

Remember her! It was only yesterday: oh, gulf of

time never to be crossed! Had such keen memory comfort in it now?

Again she wrote: "You made me happy; all day I had reason to be grateful to you since I learned this — the knowledge that I write under now — that I have not long to live. I cannot tell you how it is: you, by loving me so much, taught me to be brave: I feel that I do not lose you when I lose other things; I hold you now, my Trampy, do I not? We were little lovers, my dear, you and I."

Yes, she held him; if tears were the answer to that. His heart cried out for want of her. Let her speak, even to reproach, and not cease speaking, if she could do any good to him now!

Yes; there also her hand was on him; she knew him well, had foreseen danger clearly in that nature which gambolled so joyously at her side, which she loved so; and out of so much knowledge had trusted — alas, too much: "a good man," she believed that! He bowed his head under it as though to some awful charge covering him with shame. It was not a long letter; but it took him long to read. She wrote of the money that would be his. "Yours, to be used freely and well; I trust you. You are to be yourself. If you have kept your tastes simple it gives you the means. My Trampy is to feel that his old sweetheart sends him this because she trusts him. Live free, dear heart, and you will not live ill. I have foreseen that in you." Her message to him lay there. This from the dear dead hand smote a blow upon his heart.

Tristram laid the letter down. What wisdom lay in its love! Who else, then, had spoken over him sentence of death? Who said now, And may God have mercy on your soul?

His soul? It stood up like an apparition before him, clearly defined now, and wearing the hues of death.

CHAPTER XLII

LADY PETWYN'S EXPERIMENT

LADY PETWYN, sighting Tristram over a crowd of heads, spoke sharply to the friend at her side.

"Which of you has been spoiling my boy?"

Captain Rasselles had not then seen him. "We all do," he answered, "when we get the chance. Is he in town?"

Her eye stonily fixed, and a directing nod, told that she had her quarry in view.

The Captain's eye fell on Tristram as he approached: "Ah, no!" he was quick to retract; "not our doing, that!" He had seen men go under fire with that sort of face: men cold and conscious of their risk, with no shout of battle in their hearts.

"So here you are!" spoke up Lady Petwyn. "Well, you come quick at call, I'll say that for you. Anything wrong?"

Tristram was trained now, and could answer directly and with ease. "Am I so off colour? I have a cold."

"That, with you, counts as a portent," returned the lady. "You used to spend the days of your youth running about and trying to catch one."

"Youth, then, has accomplished its end," said Tristram. "I *am* growing up, you see. Rasselles need no longer despair of me."

Lady Petwyn's duties as hostess carried her away.

"I thought you must be out of town," said the Captain when they were alone; "where have you been hiding these last months?"

"Chiefly in the Underground," answered Tristram, "that's where I am morning and evening. Punctuality is the thief of time; but in the city the thief sets the fashion. There I arrive feeling myself robbed, and am regarded as a reformed character. No, I'm in the Park no mornings at all now! Jack Talbot's up at Oxford again, making virtue easier for me."

"Expect no long respite then," said Captain Rasselles, "Jack at Oxford, from all I hear, is the same as Jack in town." He gave samples. "Catapulting a blank wall with soda-water bottles is his very latest, I hear: one burst over the Dean's head, making him run for his life. Jack's window was not spotted then, but the engine is there; and he has select parties before whom he exhibits, hoping to set a fashion in playthings which will subject all the quads to internal bombardment. The catapult will have *him* presently. Prepare to receive the projectile!"

While the Captain talked, Tristram smiled, but his attention was not fixed. The air buzzed with the chatter of a polite crowd; through it rippled laughter; seldom did any distinct words carry that a listener's ear might take up. Toward the din Tristram's head kept turning with an alert movement, as though his mind were with the crowd at his back. Rasselles, noticing it, stopped to ask, "Are you expecting anybody?"

He apologised, saying, "No; I thought I heard a voice."

"Several, I should imagine!"

"One that I have heard before." His face brightened. "There! and she laughs!" he cried at the confirming sound.

"Oh, susceptible youth!" The Captain rallied him,

but became serious to say. "Own up that you have been ill, my dear fellow; or your looks will be on my nerves."

"I have," said Tristram; "I'm well again, but I haven't my new skin on, that is all."

His hostess came and led him away to introductions. "You don't come here to talk to the people you know," she said, and kept him employed. He was useful in gatherings where people talk to pass the time, having learned the trick of light chatter, a few removes from foolishness, which society calls interesting.

Half-an-hour later Lady Petwyn had her hand on him again. Resting her full weight she was able almost to disguise the limp which, unsupported, passed now and then into contortion; therefore she loved strong arms. Rasselles and Tristram had both learned to stand negligently under the pressure she put on them.

She led him towards a corner whence came bright talk and laughter. "Harriet Jane, turn yourself and be entertained!" cried the Dame, with a slight flourish of tone to a knot of luxuriant tresses. Tristram's countenance wore a singular look; his eyes grew keen. Round came a sweet face, lively with smiles; rogue eyes glanced from Lady Petwyn to Tristram, and back again. As though to inward admonition, they became grave abruptly — too honest to be demure.

"Miss Ferring, Mr. Tristram Gavney," they were ceremoniously named to each other, and straightway left alone.

"Then it was you!" said Tristram, without pause, eager to draw speech from the mouth that waited to smile on him once more.

"Yes, you've heard of me? I am Marcia's friend."

"I did not mean that. I heard your voice."

"My voice?"

"Long ago; this summer; in the Park. 'Have you not gone to the Derby?' was what I heard you say. It was Captain Rasselles you spoke to."

"And you remembered — my voice?" Rogue eyes looked at him again. Oh, the fair face she had!

Blunt speech was Tristram's once more; it was the boy again that spoke. "You had gone by then; I only saw your back." His looks said the rest.

"And you did not remember my back?"

"Yes, I did." Tristram's eye dwelt on the warm masses of hair that waved low over the bend of a high brow. "But I remembered your voice more; and I have been hearing it all this evening!"

"Yes, I do chatter," she made excuse.

"Do now!" he begged.

"What about?"

Tristram could have cried, "About yourself!"

"About Marcia," he said instead; "have you news of her for me?"

There was a ready response: "I have messages. She knew I should be seeing you — at least, if you were in town."

"If I were in town?" repeated Tristram. "Where else could she think I would be?"

"You have written to her very little: she thinks you may be away, or ill. I was to tell her if you were looking ill; but how can I, when I have never seen you looking well." She eyed him in some doubt. "Are you not looking ill?" she asked.

"'Londony,' you may say. What else were you to tell her?"

The fair girl laughed. "Two very special things; but it is too soon to say them."

"Not if they were messages."

"They were to be to her, not to you."

"It will give me something to write about. Let me send them. They were ——?"

Ah, rogue eyes, honest eyes! Beautiful Harriet Jane

said, "It is Marcia, and you know her: how she hugs all she gets hold of. Well, I was to meet you; then I was to let her know — did I like you, and did you like me! How much, etc., was to come after."

"Now!" said Tristram, "that *is* something to write about! — I mean for me. Marcia shall hear!"

"Don't write more than your own share!" said Harriet Jane, looking at him with friendly eyes.

Easy it was for Tristram to forget himself, to believe he was happy, to become gay, with one so beautiful and kind to talk to. Oh! beauty and kindness were not all: nor yet the voice, though the charm of it drew him on.

She was a woman to know: it seemed he did know her. Six months ago his presentiment had been right; to-night she appeared, and straightway she filled the place of his dream. Strange how on the same day these two things should have happened. In the morning Doris's word had reached him; in the evening her sister-spirit had come, promising, if eyes told truth, henceforth to be his friend.

Behind those eyes lay a mind he wished dearly to know. Let her tell him of all the things she had ever done; of the places where she had lived and grown; of her thoughts and her tastes, and the books she had read; of everything great or small, that had brought her out of yesterday into to-day. Gazing at her, he did not guess how little others found her extravagantly fair. The mystery of her beauty was for him: his to question or to read. Who, his heart kept asking, is this sibyl with the dryad eyes that laugh and are grave again, and the voice born of the dancing of some mountain brook? Callirrhoë she might be named, Callirrhoë, who had nine sweet museful voices of her own: Harriet Jane was the name she bore. He had a friendship for the name, but could not think it beautiful or fitting for her. Marcia's "Harry" made a better sound: it had the right liquid note, and the ring.

He came back to the flowing charm of her voice.

They talked fast together; Marcia was an easy link, and a cover to their quick intimacy. "Why, we are not strangers a bit!" cried Tristram, as they exchanged anecdotes, and learned how often they had stood on common ground; Portruddock and Hill Alwyn held place in their hearts. He wondered why they had never met, to reiterate that in spite of it they were not strangers.

"It would be difficult," said she, "to be that. I know too many things of you — have known ever so long."

"Has Marcia talked so much?" asked Tristram.

"Not Marcia: it was Aunt Harriet; she has always told me about you. When she abused you I used to laugh. I knew you must be great friends."

"And to me she has never once mentioned you!" cried Tristram. "I doubt whether to call her a friend again. No! I'll expect now to hear that her abuse of me has left off."

"Perhaps since yesterday," said the girl, "not longer. I judge from the noise she made she had not left off loving you then."

They laughed, with a common understanding of the old dame's heart.

"You? does she abuse you?" asked Tristram, hoping to discover that she had a share in those fierce favours.

"We are great friends," said Harriet Jane.

"That is answer enough, I see," said he. "You call her aunt?"

"She is not: we are no relations; but she is everything I have." She added, "I am telling you nothing sad, not sad to me, I mean, for I only remember her. She and my father were great friends. Has she never spoken to you of him?"

"Ferring?" queried Tristram, beginning to recall the name. It grew familiar to his ear. "Then I have heard

of you!" he said: "the little baby that was named after her; and your father died the same year that you were born. Oh, wonderful! was it you?"

Why it was wonderful he did not know: he chose to think that it was. Everything about her was that. To Lady Petwyn also his heart went out with a new tenderness: did so fair a result prove her goodness of heart?

The girl spoke of home. "Where is that?" asked Tristram.

"It is Hill Alwyn now. I mean Portruddock, that used to be my home. Sentimentally it is still."

"Yet you were away when I came."

She said "Yes," and returned to the ploughboy episode that had already been named and laughed over. "You do not look like a ploughboy now," she told him.

He sighed, wishing much that he did. "How can one in London?" he complained.

"You should come out of it!"

"Ah! You think so!" he said, as though her lightest word were wisdom. "You do not like London? Could you live here? No!"

But she had not such reasons as he to hunger for escape: no shadows of the prison-house had crossed her life.

"Like London?" she said, "I think I do? I seldom dislike being where I am. Live in it? Not unless one had to. Country is where I run; and the sight of hills makes home for me. I am only in London for a month. I think I look forward to it."

Could he do as much? Back thoughts came to trouble him; he threw them off, living for the moment that gave him a semblance of happiness once more. For the rest of the evening, while guests came and went, the two new friends talked on, and noticed little the gradually emptying rooms. They had found a corner for themselves

away from the general gaze; there at last Lady Petwyn came on them.

"Harriet Jane," she cried, "off with you to your bed! You should have been asleep an hour ago. Young man, as the last of my guests, if you require a bed say so. Otherwise it is time you left!"

In spite of her words her hand on his arm detained him. Harriet Jane and he exchanged adieux under the lady's eye.

"Then we write and tell Marcia?" said she.

"Marcia shall be pleased at what *I* say," he replied.

Laughing they loosed hands. Lady Petwyn accepted a caress; the beautiful vision fled.

Tristram still had his eyes on the door through which she had passed, when Lady Petwyn's voice brought him back to earth.

"Well, and are you not tired of your Necropolis yet?" she asked him.

"And if I were, what good?" he queried back.

She shrugged, and said, "There's all the wickedness of Cob's Hole waiting to exchange, when you like. You flout me: I'm a fool: I'm a faithful soul: I don't go back on my word."

"Believe that I'm grateful ——" said Tristram, and would have said more.

"Gabble, Gabble!" cut in the lady. "If you are, show it!" She would hear no more from him, making haste to say: "What about my Harriet Jane? Do you like her?"

Tristram's "I do!" should have given her what she wanted.

She looked at him to know more, saying, "Much? Little? Enough?" She would not release him till he had answered.

He warmed under her scrutiny, troubled by sudden

thoughts. "Perhaps too much!" he said in a tone that satisfied her.

Harriet Jane Petwyn opened his eyes to her meaning. "Kiss me!" she said. A little triumph rang in her voice.

He pressed his lips to the hard, withered cheek, saying no word. It was their first embrace — their last. "Good-night," was all he said.

Simply and fatally she had revealed to him where he stood; in her wish he saw his own. There was something then more sacred to him than his word. "The glutton's God is his belly, the proud man's his word!" was a gibe of Lady Petwyn's that recurred to him now.

If he were a proud man, that night he cast off his God. London was empty of him the next day.

CHAPTER XLIII

ANTAEUS DROPS TO EARTH

THE indication of Tristram's flight came into Marcia's hands. It was brief: his letter named freedom as the goal toward which he had disappeared. Let all who cared for him, he wrote, be glad that he had found sense at last to know what he could and what he could not be; cowardly he had been, merely from the fear of giving pain. What he did now, spared them a later blow. If he came back, she should find him a different man, and his own master; let that much be known. Those were cruel words to pass on to one gentle heart. His mother's face became grey at hearing them; she bowed submissively as to a fresh stroke of age.

Marcia's own belief was too indefinable to be put into words; almost unreasonable to herself was the trust she held fast. She sat for hours with her mother's hands in hers, seeking to extend comfort, and could find no speech for it. "I have lost my boy, I have lost him!" cried the poor lady again and again.

Suspense lay over the house while Mr. Gavney went up to town to gather what information was to be had. A calendar month of absence from the places that should have known him raised to conviction the lurid suspicions he had formed of his son's doings. Enquiry as to Tristram's hours added evidence that common-sense could not refuse. Much that he gathered was true enough. Where

no record could be traced apprehension made missing ends meet. He went home with a clear understanding of the case. The young man had not merely dabbled, as young men will; over head and ears he had plunged; his flight had been but the finishing scandal, covering he knew not what of monstrous and horrible. For many weeks after he ran an anxious eye over the columns of his newspaper.

His meeting with his wife when he returned, assured of the main fact, was pathetic. Coming to her couch he lifted deprecating hands. "Ask me nothing!" he said, as he kissed her, and drew a wailing woman to his breast. "You tell me I have lost my boy?" echoed again the cry that had worn her daughter's nerves.

Marcia kept to herself a better hope, and the words that gave it, secret from other eyes. Breaking a larger promise, Tristram had not forgotten to fulfil a small one. "I have seen your Harry," he wrote. "Do I like her? you wish to know. Marcia, my answer is this: I like her as I like perhaps two other women in all the world; if I see her again it will be love. That is my wish: pray it may come true! I am for the air-cure now. You cannot long to see me again as I to see you, with all it means."

That longing had to last for many months. Short record is best, till time brings the thing that is desired so much; though in the fulfilment of the desire one may not be able to find joy.

Bembridge, in the following July, was gathering the wandering tribes of England to the celebration of St. Swithin's fair. Yellow caravans rolled along the quiet country roads; and on Randogger's Edge Welsh ponies were camped to get into condition for the day of sale.

Gipsies are as a rule their own doctors; but one night a man rode in to Bembridge on an errand that brought Doctor Tomlin back with him.

The doctor was led to a tent pitched by a stream-side, with the reach of great boughs overhead between it and the stars. Under its shelter a thin body lay stretched, making a feeble motion of hands, as though forbidding any stranger to approach.

A light was brought; by its flicker and glare, amid odd shadows cast along the flapping sides of the tent, the Bembridge doctor saw and could recognise Tristram Gavney's face.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE RIGHTEOUS

SOFT light slanting as through a depth of green waters fell over the bed on which Tristram lay. He was back in his old room. There sleep had visited him best, there waking had given him most joy; it was the very nest of home. Recognising it faintly his faculties absorbed peace: the repose of childhood seemed to wait upon him there. Not troubling to count the days, he yet watched, as the hours drew over him, the familiar slopes of shadow cast by the morning and evening light across those walls; and remembered what childish fancies had attached to each moving form. Across the ceiling at certain hours walked the shadows of folk traversing the court below: headlong figures flinging dim diagonal limbs from corner to corner as they passed. These, coming and going fitfully, were restful company to his brain; entertained by them he did not have to think.

His bed was drawn close to the window; a mere turn of the head allowed him to lay his face on the sill, and catch a glimpse of garden and field, and the ridge of wooded slopes beyond.

Outside lay heat, and over everything the dry, strained look of a continuing drought.

The pallid air, robbed of its moisture, was filmed through as with impalpable dust; light seemed like a file rasping the ether as it came; overhead the heavens were

as brass, and every day seemed to put off further from the weary earth the faint prospect of rain. Better than such outlook, till the covering hours of night, were the cool shadows of Tristram's own room; there he lay and had not to move or think. It was sufficient to feel himself at home.

Since it had received him, two faces had been by his pillow to add a welcome to the comforts of which he was but dimly conscious. His mother's visit had been brief; even that seemed to strain the strength of a body more frail than he had known it before. Her whispered joy at seeing him, if indeed it could be called joy, had been answered more in signs than speech; after first words five minutes of clasped hands had been the extent of their communing.

Miss Julia Gavney was a more frequent visitor. She came to see that the nurse omitted no duty and to fulfil her own; in her practical way she meant to be kind. She devised cooling drinks for him, and, unasked, brought flowers to his bedside: things small enough, but unlike the aunt with whom he had exchanged exasperation in the old days.

One day, wild flowers showed her remembrance of his taste for "weeds," and a patience towards it at last. It caused him to say almost with apology at their next meeting, "You are very kind, Aunt Julie!"

"Things are so dried up in the garden," she answered, to put a mere matter-of-fact reason on the gratification she had given him; but seized the occasion to say, "Are you dull? shall I sit with you?" And though, from a dislike to be waited on, he always when possible dismissed his nurse, his faculty for wishing was too faint to oppose what was kindly meant: he let her come.

She secured the habit of sitting with him for an hour or two each day. "Shall I read?" came next to be a

natural query on the days that followed. "Yes," he would say, or "no." She was patient to his least wish; and he, trying to find hers. Curious, if to a mind that had become altogether incurious it could be called that, seemed this attendance on him of one with whom he was so little in sympathy. He wondered why, on the useless remnant of him, so much trouble should be expended.

One day, in answer to the usual question, he said, "Yes, do read!" and named his book. She hesitated, and ended by stating gently the direct scruple she had in her mind.

"It is Sunday!" she said.

That was news to him. The objection was met by his saying, "Read what you like, then." He knew now what she wished her reading to be. Very well, let it be that!

Miss Julia Gavney worshipped the church-calendar. Mere formality, and not intent, caused her to open upon a sentence startlingly to the point.

"My son, hast thou sinned?" were the first words she read; "do so no more, but ask pardon for thy former sins."

Tristram heard, and no resentment rose in his heart, though he believed the passage deliberately chosen for his benefit. He let her read on; and of sin itself was told: "If thou come too near it, it will bite thee; the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion slaying the souls of men."

Yes, that was true; this also that followed: "The inner parts of a fool are like a broken vessel." There, plainly enough, he saw himself.

At the end of the chapter his aunt's eye dwelt on his face; compunction caused her then to excuse her selection. "It is to-day's special lesson," she explained.

"Extra-special!" murmured Tristram, with a faint smile. The cry of the London streets was in his ears.

After that Julia Gavney was allowed to have her way; daily she read to him as he drowsed languidly through the hours. Life meant little enough to Tristram now; the useless thread of it still running through him helped him to realise more and more man's impotence to grasp the forces on which he sets his feet. The connection between the two seemed scarcely more than exists between a swallow and the telegraph-wire on which it alights. Just as the bird rests and is supported, but with its claws cannot grasp or stay the current that speeds below, so conscious life rests ignorantly on a flow of forces, whose whence or whither it knows not. Let us own ourselves ignorant if we would begin to be wise, became for Tristram the ultimate advice to be accepted by the human race. With such a philosophy it was easy for him to sink what remained of his pride and let his aunt do as she would in satisfaction of her own sense of obligation towards him; it could matter so little now.

He had lain for over a week passively receiving the impressions of his surroundings, before it occurred to him to make enquiry after what was missing.

"Where is Marcia?" he asked then.

Constraint was in Miss Julia Gavney's reply. "Marcia is away," said she.

On Tristram's further enquiry, "Does she know I am here?" an evasive answer followed a moment of cogitating silence.

He understood and acquiesced.

The humility of his silent acceptance of that news did not reach a mind so lacking in intuition as Miss Gavney's. Indifference was all she discerned in his mild reception of the decree which kept Marcia from her home. Could she have looked below the surface she would have discovered

strange turmoil. Tristram's brain had now something definitely like famine to set it working again, robbing it of repose.

"Marcia! I am not to see *her!*" was the blank-eyed thought that stared at him. The realisation of that roused the old passionate emotions which had always been prone to spring with a consciousness of absence from those he loved. In his feeble body great wants began to grow which had lain quiescent under the burden of his sickness. His heart started on a passionate retrospect; with a desperate repair of their forces, all against his will, his senses became keen-edged once more. They wandered down separate vistas of his memory, each on its own track, joining at moments of delight among the perished days of his childhood and youth. Memories of sight and hearing and scent drew him back into the world which he was never again to see; and the things farthest off were now as much a possession to him, a mere spectator henceforth, as those that belonged but to yesterday. More; for did they not contain more joy, were they not more vivid than anything that could touch him now? That was the one test of life; since no future remained, only the past could be real for him now.

He remembered a fall, and the sound of waters in his ears, and the clear sunny bed of a shallow brook in which he had lain contentedly bubbling out his breath; of water, from that day he never remembered to have had a fear. Water! The thought called him back from the past. Outside lay a parched earth, fainting in the hot drought.

He remembered the voice of his Aunt Doris, singing to him in the woods: he, and she, and Marcia, huddled together under a cloak over which came the pelt of rain. That was in great Randogger. Never again was Randogger to spread its boughs between him and the sky.

He remembered Marcia saying that she was taller than he; and how, for the test, they had stood back to back, with elders looking on to see that they stood fair; and how at the level touching of their heads he had clapped his hands crying, "Then we are twins!" Marcia had been cross with him then. His twin! Marcia also he was to see no more.

He remembered a summer night when he had dived, and seen lightning come down and visit the hollow bed of the pond, mapping it out like a world washed by air; and thence had risen to hear the roar of the storm. Never was he to dive into those deep waters again.

He remembered at night the trampling of a horse on a distant hill; and how he had been drawn by the sound to a free run over the shadowy earth; and to a climb up from the valley to catch over the dark hollows below the first gleam of dawn. No horse, nor foot, nor hill, nor valley was ever to feel the weight of him again.

He remembered a hillside where a tree stood apart in a broad field, how water had sprung tawny from the clay, and flowed wide around the tree's roots; how the tree had given place to a well, whose waters were a cool drink whatever heat lay above. Was he never again to taste that well, that water which he had once proudly named his own?

He remembered the scent of flowers brought out by rain; and the smell that rose with it from the drenched and thankful soil. Rain! was he never to hear it again sounding from heaven to earth?

He remembered the scent of white flowers coming to him as he entered a dark room: flowers which had been soiled and whose freshness no washing could restore.

Consciousness brought him back to his own surroundings; clove pinks were standing in a jar at his bed-side.

That day when his aunt came to dole out to him the

portion of scripture reading upon which her heart was set, he surprised her by saying, "There is something I want you to read; may I choose?"

She assented, hopeful of having at last touched his spirit with her ministrations; but when the actual passage he had asked for lay under her eye she was puzzled, so little reference did it seem to have to spiritual things. Tristram had petitioned for the chapter wherein the names and deeds of David's mighty men stand recorded. Much was mere catalogue, a boastful stringing of the names of heroes. He let her read on, giving no nearer indication of the thing he was in quest of. It came at last, and struck a desolate thrill to his heart. Water! was its cry; a passion three thousand years old became the prayer of to-day!

"And David longed and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is at the gate." He heard his own soul crying in those words. He, too, had a well of water lying free under the eye of heaven; many days of the waste of life left to him he would give to have drink of it now; and yet he would not ask.

Miss Gayney finished the chapter rigorously; through all the string of long names which form its concluding portion, she read, and reading, came to believe that she was mocked. Tristram lay with closed eyes, listening no more. "Thank you," he said, when at last she had done. She laid the book down, and without another word left the room.

For a few days afterwards he wondered mildly why her readings to him were not renewed; but presently he let thought of it go. She still came and sat with him, and renewed the flowers on the table at his side; but did not again submit herself to the chance of having her ministrations reduced to a cataloguing of dead Hebrews. Thus

characteristically did these two come to yet another misunderstanding, mattering little enough in itself, which time was never to put right.

A few days later, Tristram opening his eyes at dusk, after a drowsy lapse from consciousness, saw beside his bed a figure bowed forward in the attitude of prayer.

The face was hidden in the coverlet, across his feet he felt the faint pressure of hands. "Aunt Julie!" he thought, and grew troubled, wondering whether affection that he had coldly rejected crouched there praying for one who would not pray for himself.

He eyed her pitifully, till doubt arose. It became certainty, clutching him by the throat. He broke silence, crying, "Marcia!"

CHAPTER XLV

THE HOUSE OF MY FRIENDS

HER face was like well-water to his thirsty soul. Its draught of love lay waiting for his lips. "My Trampy!" was the low, eager cry with which she sprang and leaned to take and be taken to his embrace.

By no gesture, but by the deadly quiet of his utterance, he held her back from him. "You must not kiss me now, Marcia," he whispered. "Dear, dearest, oh, why have you come?"

"Trampy," she moaned, "could I stay away, with you here? Oh, my dear, my dear! they were cruel; it had been kept from me. You and I, to be parted! — Who in all the world had such a right?"

She had his hands, with humble lips showing him her love. "You will not ask me to leave you now?" she asked, and cried, "no, no!" laying her face back on the thin palms.

He begged her to turn the blinds to let in the dusk of the outer world. "Look at me," he said; — "your face this way! I want all the light there is to see you." He added, "I had three prayers which I thought useless to pray; one of them was to see you."

"And the others?" she begged him to tell.

"No. You are the best of them," he said.

"I would wish them to be better than me if they can

be had," cried this new Marcia. "Dearest, what are your prayers?"

"One — you shall tell me of that presently. The other — water from my well! Will you get me that?"

"Oh, my Trampy," she cried in deep sorrowfulness of tone. "Don't ask me another thing I can't do! Your well, dear ——" She stopped; his eyes searched her face.

There he read grief, and wondered what truth was about to pour its poison into his ear.

"Is dry," she whispered; "I was told to-day — quite dry!"

He tasted the drought of his mother-earth.

There was silence between them for a while. "And your other prayer? will you tell me that?" Marcia at last found voice to say.

It seemed an unsubstantial one now, and best left unspoken: merely to hear a voice! "One prayer in three is as much as I deserve," said he, and so let the third lie secret.

Gradual silence fell over this first meeting of brother and sister, while feebleness laid its weight on him once more. When darkness drew him away to sleep, Marcia sat by him still, wondering at the thin flow of life which pricked in his pulse.

She learned, in the days following, to submit her love to the hardest thing of all — absence from his side. They met but for short moments; he wished apparently for no more — giving her errands that filled many hours of her time; service to him that made it just bearable to be away. To Hiddenden and Beacon Farm, and to the small green court at the back of Bembridge High Street, and elsewhere in the bowered ways round Randogger she took and brought back messages; she, the jealous one, carrying faithfully and eagerly little messages of love, rendering

back to him the uncouth eloquence of simple hearts. He was to be quick and get stout again, was Duffin's word. Many echoed it; and sent him, with good wishes, gifts home-grown and home-made, heavy enough sometimes even for Marcia, when she volunteered to save hard-working poor folk the long charitable tramp they proposed.

One day she came with word of Lady Petwyn back at Hill Alwyn, wrestling with sharp incredulous speech over the news that had reached her. "What's he doing it for?" was the harsh complaint of a tongue that had no soft ways of indicating distress. And, "Fiddlesticks!" quoth she to Marcia's matter-of-fact statement that the doctor's comings were twice a day; "Tomlin's a very weasel for his fees! An ache costs me more under him than to be turned inside-out up in town. Cut down his calls, and you'll have your prodigal sitting up and eating fatted calf before the week's out! Oh, yes, take him my best respects; say I'll come over and rout him if he persists." A mere saying; she never put herself to the ordeal, dreading too much to have to believe the sight of her eyes. Marcia, for an obstinately offending countenance, underwent a fierce fly-out of the old dame's abuse. Long faces might go to the hangman for her; she could not tolerate them. Her own face strained; she gesticulated, laughing angrily now and then. "Tell him," said she for a wind-up, "that Harriet Jane arrives next week; that'll brisk him!"

That last item of intelligence Marcia did convey to Tristram; comforted for herself also, that her own great friend was soon to be at hand. The prospect brought a definite request to his lips. "When she comes, Marcia, take her into the garden, and — make her laugh."

She looked at him to wonder, and became wise when he answered, "My third prayer will be granted then."

But the event proved that he had spoken rightly of the

event; his portion was to be one out of three; just what he deserved, his fate allowed.

Lady Petwyn unwittingly interposed between him and the fulfilment of that other wish. After the interview with Marcia, she summoned Doctor Tomlin imperiously to a breach of professional etiquette. Having reduced him to submission, she rated him to the doorstep; till, beholding the kind fellow actually moved to an unmanly display of feeling as he mounted his gig, and realising that her own harsh words were not the immediate cause, she retired abruptly to her own solitude, and may be pardoned by tender hearts for her brief and emphatic damning of Life's play as she beheld it then, under the shivering verge of the last dark curtain's descent. Any comings to Hill Alwyn were countermanded after that. Harriet Jane remained at her Welsh home.

How far Tristram was from the feast of the fatted calf may be known by this: he, the sociable lover of his fellows, prayed now constantly to be left alone; now till disembodiment came, he could welcome no longer the touch of hands, the meeting of eyes; friends, lovers, and kinsfolk, he wished them all to stand afar off, not at gaze.

Marcia set an obedience that was followed, so far as was possible, by all who moved round the sick chamber. Tristram was given his wish, such freedom as could be his still; he was let alone. Many hours at his door, the faithful love of his sister kept watch, refusing to break the seal of the privacy which he had chosen as the last refuge of sick body and sick mind. A heart as gentle and as loving did as a duty what Marcia for a like reason left undone.

One afternoon Tristram became conscious by a faint movement of drapery at his ear that his peace had been invaded. He turned his face and found his mother sitting

listless and quiet beside the bed. She had the appearance of long waiting, till the effort of watching and expecting had become too much for her; her eyes drooped, weary over that vigil of attendance for recognition. Now it came, she was no longer on the look-out.

He moved his hand towards her and spoke; his voice had fallen to a whisper of its old strength. "Why, mother!" he said, "is this right?" She seemed more worn than he imagined himself to be; it was pity to him to think of her in such weakness coming to him, dragged from the tender ruin of her own days to this, the more tragic scene into which his own had fallen. He pushed his hand in a slow crawl across the coverlet, inviting the clasp that came; she lifted it between thin palms, and drew it to her lap.

For him she was the greater invalid still; he was full of solicitude, faintly importuning her to speak. Did she sleep well now, without pain?

"Yes, my dear," she answered in the soft grieving tones which suffering had given her. "I get good nights now and then; except when I have to be thinking of you."

Her hand invited a response from his. Tristram lay and felt the pressure, and without answer let it relax again, nor knew how to convey to the dear mind contrition that any hour of her night's rest should be given up to him. These were helpless loves, his and hers; they could give and take no comfort from each other now; to give pain was the one power left to them. Bitter sadness for her filled his heart; but it held, he knew, no balm to satisfy her prayer for him; his own prayer was merely to die; could he tell her that?

So he lay, fearing to move eye or hand, lest he should provoke a touch too personal in a case where all the tenderness in the world could bring no healing. "And she loves me!" was the wonder that recurred; and the

convicting thought that she loved not him, but a stranger whom he did not know, came to drive its bitter iron into his soul.

"She does not love *me*," he thought, "why should she?" and could no longer thrill to the touch of her frail fingers. What memories, he wondered, had she of him, which made her tender to him now, or what for which her love rebuked him? Were they those for which he rebuked himself, and was one of them submission and obedience to her blind word? Himself, not her, he charged with the wrong of that!

Oh, woman thy son: oh, son thy mother! What strangers now are two between whom never a harsh word has been! what failures can be Love's!

Her composure melted under his withering silence. She sat weeping silently over the hand she held. Conscious that some of her tears had fallen on him, unguessing the dire anguish they caused, she wondered that no sign came in answer to her grief. He must have a hard heart, she thought, to let her weep on uncomforted; yet even to have sight of such coldness she turned his way, hoping yet that the spectacle of her sorrow might make him hers.

The unearthly quiet of his gaze struck her with a kind of dread; was he disembodied that he could lie there watching the tears that flowed for love of him, and make no answer at all?

Soul and body were indeed already in dissolution; the one no longer expressed what the other felt. Outwardly this calm; within the ever-repeated cry, "Oh, mother, and you love me!" beating against the feeble brain till he almost fainted, to be soul to the soul that could not read him.

Thus soundless griefs lay between them, and gulfs they could not plumb. Only the mother recognised the weakness of the body before her, and on that built up excuse

for him. She imagined it must have sunk him too low for the experience of emotion, that it was a dying flame without warmth in it, whose expiring struggle she watched. Scarcely did he seem the child whom the birth-pangs had first made dear to her, and whom disgrace heaped on disappointment and trouble had not estranged from her affections. Now, instead, she trusted she might find a human soul waiting for a mother's word to help it: and, as she faced the task, her terror was lest the gentle creed of her life should be short of stark truth, presuming too human a hope under the deeper shadows of God's will. Terrible to her mild eyes was the statement of life here summed up for them to gaze on. Praying for speech, she dreaded lest at last she should fail. She prayed; yet, when she spoke, it was more intimate and earthly teaching which guided the limited insight of her words.

"When I lie awake thinking of you." The long silence was broken at last in the repetition of that thought.

Her tired face as she spoke, nerving herself for what she must say, gave to Tristram's sensitive vision a retrospect of solitary watchings and prayer that had taxed her beyond her strength. He submitted himself then without a sign to the operation of that loving-kindness which he saw was to fall on him.

She spoke of what was in her heart; of her own sorrow and fear; of his record, leading by self-will and rebellion and sin to this that lay now before their eyes; nor dared she any longer spare herself from the utterance of words she believed true. "Do not think me hard," she murmured once. Had there been tears in him, he must have shed them then.

She spoke of the father whom his conduct had estranged. "Do not think," she said, "that he does not suffer and feel a father's love because he has not been to you here. A word of sorrow from you would bring him,

my dear." She paused and said again — "A word from you."

Tristram was silent. The kindest voice in all the world went on, and delivered up to the end the message it had for his ear.

"You have been headstrong," she said; "the young often are. But you with your wild ways and your self-will made so bad a name for yourself here that we had to let you go away. There are things I do not know; but I do know that Mr. Hannam most truly forgives you the wrong you did, the deception of his son, letting him cover your sin. Because of you he has no son now to comfort him; yet he comes, and you will not see him. There, also, my dear, your pride — a word from you."

Tristram's hand expressed acceptance of her wish.

His mother said, "You cannot undo what is done; all the more, what you can do, do! You have not always banished deceit from your actions, my dear. You may do that now." She referred again to the causes which sent him from home. "In London," she said, "you were given the means to a fresh start; yet you did not seem even glad of the opportunity. And what did you do with it in the end? Dear boy, let your own conscience answer; I am not asking you to tell me anything now. That chance which your father's kindness gave you, costing him so much at a time when he could ill afford it, that chance also you threw away! You are young still, yet have much to look back upon that should make you grieve. How many fair hopes you have wrecked, and why? Think, as you lie here!"

Fondling his hand, she spoke her last word. "My boy, my Tristram, you are home again, and your mother's heart has not changed, whatever may have become of yours. When you lie awake, and cannot sleep — you do sometimes, do you not? — remember that I, too, may be

keeping awake with you, praying God, if He will, not to hasten the time, but to have pity upon my boy."

It was ended at last, the voice of sad age to sad youth; and ignorance, made so little wise by love, had uttered its dear, pitiable, fond say.

Tristram, without looking at her, thought when all was done, "Does she know what an old man she has been talking to?" Well, this old man had been her child once upon a time.

It was ended. He could not look at her face; the thought of her gentle inexperienced age coming to give counsel to him after his own devouring speed through the lessons of life, touched him with its infinite futility. The good grey spirit of her face, that soft domestic presence contemporary to a thousand vibrating memories, made an exquisite demand for grace at his hands at this last time of their meeting.

His love grew in a fantasy of tenderness. The way she had worn silk and sat to receive company; the withered flower-like face, the throat wrinkled and thin before the true middle-age had come; her voice through an open window on warm days which were still too cold for her; her gradual disappearance from her place at the family meals; each short-coming which had fallen to her portion of the bliss of life; all these things accumulated now to lay pitying constraint upon him, bidding him extend to her such comfort as truthfully he could.

When she had done a trembling seized her; she looked at him with frightened cast-down eyes, her whole spirit a feather for the breath of any rebuff; the weakest lips could have delivered it had they willed.

Tristram uttered no word. He lay still, stroking her hand down with his own, softly and slowly, many times over; only weakness at last caused him to forbear.

Then she was gone; and the white drought of the outer

world and the fiery languor of the long afternoon were his infinite companions once more.

His longing for all the cooling springs earth held buried for the seasons to come, or heaven might one day send and restore, grew slack in a body too feeble to look for anything that was still so undiscoverably far. He wished instead that he might live long enough to see the dawn once more come trembling over the east, folding in its rays the high lonely tree he had climbed when a boy to find the crow's nest wherein a wind-hover had made its home.

CHAPTER XLVI

IN WHICH THE READER WILL DRAW HIS CONCLUSIONS

WORD went out one evening late in August, that Tristram Gavney lay dead. The news was carried in the rough country dialect from Little Alwyn, over the Beacon way as far as Hiddenden; in other directions it touched remote places, not named in this record, which the Tramp had visited in his wild rounds, claiming the hospitality of open doors. It was strange how many knew him, had spoken with him, perhaps but once, and remembered him — none unkindly. Lady Petwyn, when the rumour became confirmed, had the blinds of Hill Alwyn down, and went growling up to town to abuse her doctor for the ills he had failed to cure in her. She had taught him to deal frankly with her; temper he told her was her worst disease. She owned it, and the reason, shaking a haggard face at him. "All my life," she said, "my affections have run iron into me; either into my hair, or my heart, or my legs. I'm a lame dog, doctor (wrong sex, but it doesn't matter): get me over the stile quick, and have done with me!"

He told her his belief that she had another good ten years of life in her.

"What? can't you send me to some waters where I can get poisoned off quicker than that?" she asked him, "you aren't half a doctor!"

She went off huffing, full of complaints and grey loneliness, but not in the least either wishing or intending to depart this life with the speed her words indicated. Hill Alwyn saw her not again till the next spring. Tristram's grave was then already green; homely in its surroundings, so wearing a likeness to his memory in simple minds which had seen but the kindly surface of his youth.

Mr. Gavney, fulfilling the last duty of a father, had walked as chief mourner to his son's dishonoured remains. Surprised, he noted how many attended at so simple a ceremony; it was gratifying as a tribute to the high respect which the name of Gavney had attained in the neighbourhood. That Lady Petwyn's unoccupied carriage should follow his own, was a condescension of sympathy which helped him greatly in the ordeal he had to undergo.

Somewhat troubling to his mind was the presence of Marcia, whose insistence in the matter had seemed to him unfeminine, hardly in keeping with the social usages of the day. He had told her it was unnecessary. Her answer had been, "I must." So she was there, moving in a world of thoughts which revealed nothing of their nature in her face. A single sentence uttered after the ceremony, told him much of her fortunate ignorance concerning her brother's true character. He spoke on the way home of the mother, so broken in her grief, and confessed his anxious haste to get back to her. Thinking of her, he could not spare to indicate the trial and disappointment of such a son to so tender a heart. "Youth is so selfish," he lamented, covering the individual in the type.

Marcia said, "All that I ever learned of unselfishness was from him. No one knew him as I did!"

To Mr. Gavney the remark sounded uncomfortably inappropriate. Wishing to be tender to her he said, "You saw a better side of him than he showed to others."

She answered passionately, "I did! yet I never loved

him enough!" and was silent thereafter, having eased herself of a duty which she conceived she owed to Tristram's memory; her outspokenness secured silence in her hearing from lips which could speak no truth of one she held in honour.

What did speak surely were the two letters under one cover which the irony of fate had brought over-sea only that morning. It was by Tristram's wish that Marcia laid claim to missives which came addressed to him, thinking with sisterly content how out there one dear memory was safe. They bore a far-away post-mark, not to be called foreign by one whose blood belonged to the great modern mother of nations. In them she read of a man she loved, happy with another woman, pledged to a life that suited his faculties. Both letters named her, both blessed Tristram. Lizzie's she laid to her face, and could shed on it the tears which had not fallen by her brother's open grave.

Only an extract from it may be given here, where everything is so near an end. "Just a line," wrote Lizzie, "to say with my own hand that we are happy and doing well, and my one trouble quite over. You will understand I am happy if I can write that! The new baby belongs to you and is to have your name; he is yours any time you like to come for him; or must we bring him to you? Little Raymond has your portrait over his bed; he sits up and kisses it, and calls it his beautiful man; and says he remembers you, though it's not truly possible. He grows too fast for anything, and knows more than I have time to teach him. I tell him I write to you, and he sends a kiss inside this mark to his 'beautiful man.'

"My other Raymond looks well, and so much the squire for all the rough life and the ways out here. The people round call him that, and he's pleased; for he always does like to lead, as you know.

"What he tells you is true: you would be welcome as

day to come and be with us, as your letter last year said perhaps you might. I'm glad this one's to be called Tristram, else I should be afraid of Raymond being the only favourite. Thank Marcia for remembering me, with my love; whenever I make things for my two babies I think of her. Whatever I do, I believe I have you somewhere back in my thoughts, and so shall always, dear friend."

This simple message of remembering hearts told one thing surely, making it very precious to Marcia as she read. There, where Tristram was loved, he still lived.

It was his certificate; a piece of his life snatched from waste. She carried it all day at her heart, and at night spread it before her mother's eyes to see how much of its inner meaning they would discover. Mrs. Gavney read it and remained uninstructed; sighing, she laid it by. She took her daughter fondly in her arms for their good-night embrace. "You, dear," she said, "are left to me," and wept self-pityingly. With a sort of loyalty to some good that might have been in him, she refrained from speaking her boy's name; it seemed to bring back his faults and his father's anger.

To Marcia, passing through the country-side under the droppings of autumn's gold, it became scarcely possible to think of Tristram as dead. Wherever she moved his feet had been before her; wherever she stopped were people who had known him, upon whose lives his hand had lain lightly in a hundred small ways; it was as his sister that they greeted her. Through that common bond she came to have a better and a far kindlier understanding of her fellow-men; and by a deeper insight into the losses and recompenses of individual lives to make a humbler claim for happiness in her own. It was a teaching which led her to set less store on the books that had been too much her world, and to look more into human faces for the knowledge she must turn to use.

Apart from this record, I set two passages from the poets, expressive of what those who loved him in different ways might have felt was the true thing to be said of Tristram when at last the fever of his days was ended. Marcia's word, one might be called; the other that of a very gentle, charitable woman, his mother. Like epitaphs, one-sided statements of truth, let them stand. They differ; yet each of them in its way defines a life which the world has to regard as a failure; and in one or other of them the reader may find a moral to the record which now closes.

I.

"And Youth, I most bewail thee,
Thy purpose was so great;
But the foes that did assail thee
Were stronger than thy fate,
And thy heart it was so ruddy red
That every archer knew
Where he might best impale thee
And drive his arrows through."

II.

"All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride
Of power to see, — in failure and mistake,
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side —
Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried."

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Form L9–Series 4939

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 376 853 8